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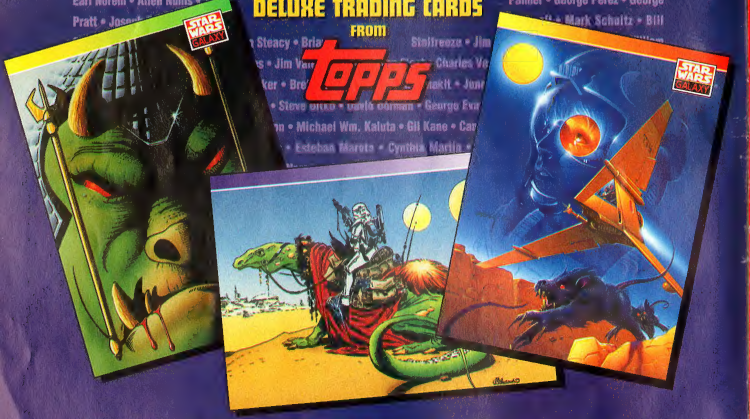

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Brave New Neat Stuff

When last we left our hero, he was dead. Well, maybe not entirely dead. Just *mostly* dead. That was the Man of Steel, in the pages of November 1992's various DC comics (as well as here, his passing noted in CS #31, the funeral for a friend held later).

Reports of his death, however, were apparently greatly exaggerated.

He's back. In quadruplicate. Superman lives. Sort of. He didn't die. Maybe.

It's all real complicated, extensively complex and somewhat enigmatic. In short, it's a mystery as to just what happened and who the Great Caesar's Ghost all these new super-guys saying, "Hey. I'm Superman" really are or think they are. (And why.) So, CS Managing Editor Maureen McTigue sat down with DC Super-Editor Mike Carlin to clear up all the riddles, tie up the loose ends, solve the entire mystery, unlock the key to imagination and answer *every* question as to the death and life of Superman.

On page 32, Mike Carlin reveals *absolutely everything* you need to know about the new Supermen. He explains it *all*. Maybe.

Meanwhile, the legends keep returning to comics. Joe Kubert has never really been away from the comics scene, his covers having appeared here and there on various DC titles. Nevertheless, throughout the last few years, Kubert has mostly been preoccupied with a goal far greater than the completion of any individual drawings. Through his Joe Kubert School, he has been training the next generation of comics artists—talents whose work began to appear in the '80s and will continue on into the next century.

But Kubert, too, is an incredible artist. That's why it's especially good to see his classic caveman, Tor, journey once more into a medium he debuted in so long ago. (OK, it wasn't exactly prehistoric times, but it *was* the 1950s—which may, in fact, be positively ancient to those readers who didn't start buying comics until 1987.) Anyhow, Marvel's Epic imprint is now unleashing Kubert's *Tor* as a mini-series. And hey, this is great stuff! Unearth this issue's brief sample—sorry, space limitations—on page 48. And then go dig up *Tor* at your local comics shop. It's a treasure.

And what welcome news that Jack Kirby, the King of Comics, has returned. Here's a guy who has created and/or co-created (with Joe Simon and later Stan Lee) enough comics characters to fill a small sub-continent yet still have enough left over to populate Texas. Kirby's work is, really, the history of comics. He has been all but retired for several years. Now he's back, not actively writing and drawing, but providing the concepts and characters for several Topps Comics titles (see page 16).

Involving such fellow legends as Steve Ditko, Roy Thomas, Dick Ayers and Don Heck (as well as Tony Isabella and others), this really represents Topps' attempt, midwifed by Kirby, at re-creating Marvel history. Whether it works or not in today's comic marketplace, it's still exciting.

The Kirby/Topps collaboration is only one of a galaxy of brave new worlds opening up for business. The comics scene is a place where, scientifically speaking, the big bang has become a regular thing and universes unfold full-born at the drop of a word processor. The Image Universe—which Jim Lee explores further with *Deathblow*, see page 11—continues to expand, built brick-by-brick by a dozen independent creators. Dwayne McDuffie, Denys Cowan and others have teamed up to unveil the Milestone Universe, intriguing turf for new heroes.

Come this summer, master fantasist Clive Barker launches a new world of good and evil via Marvel's Razorline. They've branded it, aptly, the Barkerverse. Fresh from his triumphs and trials at Valiant, Jim Shooter is now Defiant, creating a brave new universe to go along with his brand new comics company. Malibu has taken the team approach, assembling a dozen top writers and artists to fashion the Ultraverse and those who battle there. And Dark Horse offers no less than the World's Greatest Comics, a new universe focusing on four distinctive cities and the heroes and villains created by another awesome group of comics talents.

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—David McDonnell/Editor

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Harvey Kurtzman

1924-1993

Listing all of Harvey Kurtzman's accomplishments on one brief page would be an impossible task. Simply put, his was a remarkable career.

He created *Mad* magazine. He was responsible for the first modern, realistic war comics; he is acknowledged as the father of underground comix; and he co-created "Little Annie Fanny" for *Playboy*. He even played a crucial role in the development of Monty Python.

Kurtzman was a teacher, a humorist and a master of the graphic story. It isn't quite accurate to call him an unsung genius, because his abilities and achievements influenced anyone with enough savvy to study his work, or lucky enough to hear him lecture classes of aspiring comics pros.

In the early 1940s, he began his career in comics, mostly doing humor strips for Ace, Quality and Timely, including his famous one-page "Hey Look!" strips. He joined William Gaines and EC Comics in 1949, where he worked on various horror, crime and SF stories. He broke new ground in *Frontline Combat* and *Two-Fisted Tales*, with stories that presented the ugly truth about battle. He refused to glamorize war, which was a revolutionary concept in the early '50s. "War comics up until then had been very one-sided. I wanted stories to show that all soldiers had the same problems, no matter who they were fighting for. I decided to show what war is really like," he said.

His best-known achievement came soon after, when Kurtzman came up with an irreverent, sophomoric, brilliant magazine that could only be called *Mad*. Kurtzman was with *Mad* for just 28 issues, but it was enough time to supply *Mad* with its most important component: Attitude. He taught an entire generation to question authority and think for themselves: Father didn't always know best. But he was an unlikely subversive who never lost his sense of humor—*Mad* was always funny, and had an edge that its competitors lacked.

Photo: Lawrence G. Beck

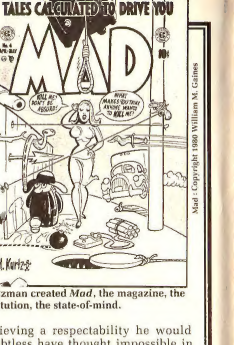
Harvey Kurtzman: His was a remarkable career in comics.

The early issues of *Mad* took aim at the comic strips, films and TV shows of its day; in fact, it gave many of its young readers their first exposure to satire: This worried parents in the early '50s. When his fans grew up, they set out to change the system that Kurtzman helped teach them to question—followers like Robert Crumb, Jay Lynch and Terry Gilliam.

After *Mad* went on to become a national institution (and, in its magazine format, the only surviving EC publication), Kurtzman went on to create and publish his own short-lived humor magazines, with titles like *Trump*, *Humbug* and *Help*. The latter was the most successful, running for five years. He enlisted the likes of Woody Allen, John Cleese, Dick Van Dyke, Jonathan Winters, Jackie Gleason, Ernie Kovacs and many others for his *Help* covers and fumetti features, and among his assistant editors were Gloria Steinem (later the feminist leader) and Gilliam (Monty Python teammates Cleese and Gilliam first met on a fumetti shoot for *Help*). Kurtzman also created his acclaimed "Goodman Beaver" stories during this period.

By that time, Kurtzman fan Hugh Hefner had enlisted the artist to create an adult comic strip for *Playboy*, and Kurtzman and former *Mad*man Will Elder came up with "Little Annie Fanny," a voluptuous innocent who always seemed to end up without her clothes by each adventure's end in 1962. But somehow, it was just good clean fun, packed with laughs and presented in a lush, fully-painted format. "Little Annie Fanny" appeared in the magazine regularly for more than 25 years, though its frequency later diminished (Kurtzman talked with CS in issue #16).

Kurtzman also found time to teach and lecture on comics and storytelling at New York's School of Visual Arts,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H. Kurtz
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Kurtzman created *Mad*, the magazine, the institution, the state-of-mind.

achieving a respectability he would doubtless have thought impossible in the early '50s. When the underground comix movement sprang up in the late '60s, cartoonists like Crumb, Lynch, Skip Williamson and Denis Kitchen pointed to Kurtzman as their soul and inspiration: Kurtzman was even enlisted to draw the cover of *Bijou Funnies* #8, a tribute to his original *Mad*. In addition to paperback collections of his earlier works, including *Hey Look*, *Goodman Beaver* and several "Little Annie Fanny" publications, he authored the autobiographical *My Life As a Cartoonist* and *From Aargh! to Zap*, a visual history of comics. One of his last major works was *Harvey Kurtzman's Strange Adventures*, which included contributions by Sergio Aragones, Crumb, Dave Gibbons and Moebius.

"Harvey was a true genius," says Skip Williamson. "He was always excited by the cartooning medium. He was a source of inspiration to my sense of humor and the visionary to an entire generation of artists. As an artist, he changed the definition of what a comic book is—from a thing read by 8-year-olds to art without boundaries."

It was painful to see Kurtzman's health fail in his final years: he still had that devilish twinkle in his eye and his mind was as active as ever, but it was frustrated by a body that increasingly refused to cooperate. Through it all, though, his loving wife Adele was never far from his side.

He never achieved the mainstream prominence of *Mad* publisher William Gaines (in fact, a frightening number of young comics fans today don't understand for whom the Harvey Awards are named). But, very few people did as much as Harvey Kurtzman to advance the field of graphic art, and his influence is too vast to be measured.

—Kim Howard Johnson

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Image of the Assassin

Jim Lee isn't pulling any punches with the violent vigilantism of Deathblow.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

The newest, nastiest member of the Image Universe, Jim Lee's Deathblow makes the Punisher look like a nice guy. This ruthless killer is having second thoughts about his life and career choices in the new, ongoing series from Lee and Brandon Choi—but is he too late to do anything about it?

Premiering in *Darker Image*, the Image limited-series anthology title which also features series by Sam Kieth and Rob Liefeld, *Deathblow* will now star in his own comic every month.

"*Deathblow* is one of the most enjoyable things I've done in a while," says Lee. "He has reached the bottom pits of humanity. He's brutal, ruthless, extremely efficient—very scary, in fact—which sets up how far he has fallen, how irredeemable he is."

The *Darker Image* story features Deathblow on a deadly mission, while he begins to re-evaluate and analyze his life in the monthly series. "The *Darker Image* story sets up the character and his persona," Lee says. "Many people are going to read the *Darker Image* mini-series and think the guy's a pig, a real mean son of a bitch, but that's because I'm setting it all up for the series.

"In the regular series, we get into the story I've envisioned all along, which is his quest to regain a sense of value and humanity. The catalyst that drives him on this search is the discovery that he has a terminal disease—a brain tumor. The story starts out fairly urban and gritty and realistic, and then gets into some religious elements, but all the while, there's still more than a fair amount of action!"

The monthly book features an eight-to-10 page chapter in Jim Lee's continuing *Deathblow* saga, and includes *The Cybernary*, which is a backup series about a cybernetic mercenary, with art by Nick Manabat.

"Rather than have it feature a different adventure every three or four issues, it's going to be *one* long story with a multitude of chapters, and a number of characters who are going to be in almost every chapter," Lee explains. "I'm not sure how long it's going to run—it's an unlimited series. I have the first *Deathblow* story all mapped out, and it'll go anywhere from 10 to 20 issues. After that, I don't know; it's just in the rough stages at this

All Deathblow Art Trademark & Copyright 1993 Jim Lee All Deathblow Art By & Courtesy Jim Lee

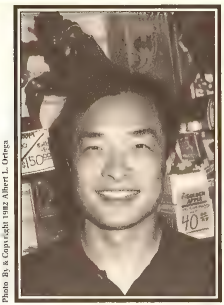


Photo: Rs & Copyright 1982 Albert L. Ortega

"Once we learn," promises Jim Lee, in defense of Image, "we're not going to make the *same* mistakes. Rome wasn't built in a day."

point. It's a different way for me to put out a monthly comic book.

"Most comics either have single stories or three-or-four-part stories. The rationale has always been, 'Kids won't stay around for a long story,' but being confined to two or three issues limits you into doing Act One in the first issue, Act Two in the second, and Act Three in the third. I want to get more cinematic with my storytelling—to try out a different style and a different way of telling stories. It's much more experimental for me, and ultimately more liberating. It has been a blast to do! It's real different from anything else I've ever done."

Lee praises Frank Miller's work, from *The Dark Knight Returns* to Miller's current stylings, noting that his own art is most heavily influenced by Miller's recent *Sin City*.

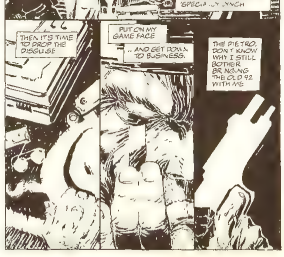
"I'm sure people will point out the similarities to *Sin City*, and that was a real inspiration. It showed me how you can have a story with a bunch of simple, bold graphic elements, and how that propels the story along much more forcefully than the style I've done. I wanted the chance to experiment and do something really different. Initially, I think it's going to look more like what Frank Miller has established, but by the time I get to *Deathblow* #2 or #3, it'll start looking pretty different.

"Frank pencilled, inked, wrote and lettered the whole thing himself—*Sin City* had a great imaginative look. Now, after having done some of this kind of work, it really forces me to plan out my spotting of blacks, and to create a composition of darks and lights. I had really gotten away from that in my traditional superhero stuff, which is more detail-oriented and more hyper-realistic than graphic. It has been a challenge to do this style, but it's a lot of fun."

THEN IT'S SHOWT' ME!
MADRE DIOS!
I THINK YOU'RE BARKIN' TO THE WRONG SAINT, PALIKO.
NO SERIOUS, FOR FAVOR. I CAN HELP YOU.
I HAVE INFORMATION.

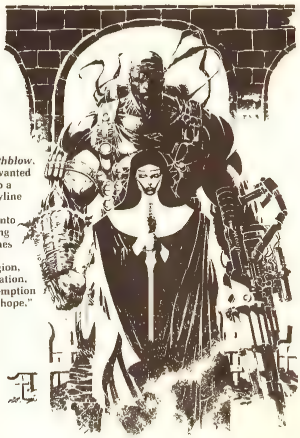
Lee's new hero is closer in style to Marvel Comics' Punisher (which he drew in *Punisher War Journal*). "Deathblow is a hero in the vein of the Punisher," he says. "He's just a regular guy who has been a warrior and a killer on the fringes of legality for so long that he has lost *any* sense of his humanity. I wanted to do a storyline that got into strong themes of religion, salvation, redemption and hope."

Once the *Darker Image* Deathblow story is complete, "we get into the story I've envisioned all along, which is his quest to regain a sense of value and humanity."


I CHECK THE HARDWARE. I SCORED FROM AN OLD I.T. CACHE. THE BOYS AT THE ARMORY SPECIAL-Y TINCH.
THEN IT'S TIME TO DROP THE DISGUISE.
PUT ON MY GAME FACE
...AND GET DOWN TO BUSINESS.
THE PISTOL DON'T KNOW WHY I STILL BOTHER BRINGING THIS OLD 92 WITH ME.

Of course, Marvel's Punisher seldom considers the consequences of his actions. While Deathblow is even more deadly, he's also more concerned with the implications of his deeds. In his initial appearances, the Punisher was depicted as a cold, psychotic killer, but when the character became popular with young readers, the company softened that approach and de-emphasized his earlier psychopathic tendencies. Lee doesn't plan to soft-pedal Deathblow's hard edges.

"The Punisher is too much of a goody two-shoes today," Lee declares. "Marvel is in this weird quandary where this guy was basically a vigilante, but they had to clean it up for


With *Deathblow*, "I wanted to do a storyline that got into strong themes of religion, salvation, redemption and hope."

the kids or the moms and make it seem like he was sane, and he never killed a civilian. All these things are just sugar-coating the ugly truth about vigilantism. Deathblow isn't a vigilante, he's a government assassin, but I'm not going to pull any punches or say he has never done anything wrong. I think he has done *a lot* of things wrong in the name of patriotism—those are the issues. None of the Image books are part of the Comics Code—I'm not going to get carried away, but the subject matter will be a little heavier."

After Deathblow's debut mission in *Darker Image*, the ongoing series explores moral and even religious issues. "He's going to get caught up in this whole web of intrigue which involves an anti-Christ and a religious order that has existed since ancient days," the writer/artist says. "This order has always fought the Devil's work, and Deathblow gets mixed up with these guys. Initially, he starts out caught in the middle, and later, he plays a more prominent role within trying to bring salvation to all, to the entire world.

"Each issue will be a continuation of the previous one, and there might even be some issues where he isn't even featured because it's focusing in on a secondary character or subplot. This is going to be the most cinematic of any project I've ever done as far as the storytelling," says Lee.

The artist plans to experiment with storytelling techniques, without tying himself down to a set number of issues to tell his story. "I wanted to give myself leeway to expand certain scenes in the overall story. One of the problems in doing a team book is that I'm trying to develop each character, and yet at the same time, I have this larger story to tell, so a lot of characterization gets thrown by the wayside. You can't do these really juicy cinematic scenes where you devote five panels to a guy putting on his costume; in a team book, you have five different people putting on their costumes and you can't do it. With *Deathblow*, I wanted to give myself the freedom to say, 'OK, this chapter is just going to involve some very small event, like checking into a hotel room and finding a problem there' – something stupid like that, in order to do a lot of close-up shots and play around with the storytelling."

Deathblow may seem to operate in a different world than other Image heroes, but they're actually all part of the same universe. "He works for Director Lynch at International Operations, introduced in *WildC.A.T.s*. Out of all the books that I'm overseeing in my corner of the Image Universe, International Operations is the glue that binds all of them together. They're all also involved with Stormwatch, with WildC.A.T.s and with Michael Cray, who is really Deathblow—Michael is an employee of theirs. He is tied in with the Image Universe, but not in the sense that he's going to show up in *Spawn*."

A crossover might also cause artistic problems for Lee. "It would be weird to cross *Deathblow* over in an issue

with *WildC.A.T.s*, because he's drawn in a *very* different style," he remarks. "If I did a *WildC.A.T.s* issue where he showed up, how would I draw him? Would he be in this weird style in every panel, and all of the WildC.A.T.s characters in this more crosshatched slick look? I haven't really thought about it! Deathblow exists in the more realistic end of the Image spectrum, but he's still part of that universe."

Deathblow is being done in a new, looser style, according to Lee, who's both pencilling *and* inking the series. "I'm inking everything with a brush for the first time, unless it's a hard edge, and then sometimes I come in with a marker. I'm playing around with the lines and stuff—the only word I can use is gnarly and very jagged, but at the same time there are big puddles of black. The artwork I tend to collect is more graphic, a lot of spotted blacks and open areas. I really love Kevin Nowlan's stuff, and Mike Mignola, Alex Toth and Frank Miller, yet my own style tends to be very grey and of medium values. I'm sure there will be a certain amount of controversy or flak from some people, who will say that I'm just ripping off Frank Miller completely, but I'm using *my* proportions and compositions, which are nowhere near as developed or impressive as Frank's. I just wanted a chance to do something different. Many people are doing what I'm doing, and it's looking real commonplace. I wanted to do a complete 180 and try something else."

This *Deathblow* style was actually preceded by his work on an issue of Epic Comics' *St. George*. "I actually did a precursor to this style years ago, on one of the last issues of *St. George*, just so people won't think this was completely inspired by *Sin City*," he says. "It had a low press run and I had that urge for something different. I did that whole issue in marker. I was cranking through that stuff, and some of it is pretty awful, but some of it isn't bad. I've learned a lot about markers and inking, and hopefully this *Deathblow* stuff will rub off on my more commercial *WildC.A.T.s* style. I'm drawing mostly with a brush nowadays. I don't really pencil the pages—I do a very rough gesture drawing, and I come back in with ink and draw while I'm inking."

In addition to boredom and the desire to experiment, Lee is implementing the experimental form because so many new artists today have borrowed his more familiar style. "There are a score of guys at Marvel doing this kind of look, and many of them are doing the X-books—some better than others. Some companies have a house style that tries to mimic what we did while we were on these books, so hopefully the kids won't notice that we left!"

"Deathblow exists in the more realistic end of the Image spectrum," Lee explains.

Jim Lee is not only one of comics' most popular artists, he's also one of the very busiest. Following the completion of the *WildC.A.T.s* miniseries, Lee is co-plotting *Stormwatch* with Brandon Choi (drawn by Scott Clark and Trevor Scott); Choi also co-plotted *Deathblow* with Lee. Late this year, Choi and Lee are working together on the *WildC.A.T.s* ongoing series, which will see Scott Williams inking Lee's pencils.

Lee and the other Image creators have taken flak during the last year for overextending themselves and missing deadlines, but the artist says he believes he's back on track.

"I finally hired some people to help me out with some administrative and business stuff," he says. "So, I've been able to spend much more time on creative things. When we started Image and the business matters came up,we all got involved because it was something new and different. But it becomes old hat after a while, and we found that we were more interested in the creative side. There were only so many business meetings we could take! We all get our rocks off writing and drawing comic books—that's why we got into the business. We were temporarily sidetracked by business stuff, but now that we've experienced it all and it's being handled by other people, we can get back to what got us here in the first place."

Lee and the other Image creators also drew a barrage of criticism during their first year, largely due to their tardiness in shipping books on schedule. Lee assures readers that they are becoming much more efficient and better organized at last. "Everyone has re-evaluated their priorities and concluded that we needed to get our books out on time, because that's really the only thing holding us back at this point. So, there is renewed confidence and vigor in the group to get these projects done and out there on a *timely* basis," he says.

The popular public perceptions about Image are all wrong, according to Lee. "There are a lot of professionals taking shots at us in the fan press, and frankly, they have their heads up their asses! They *really don't know* what's going on!" he exclaims. "I think it drives them nuts because they *don't* know what's going on, so they use hearsay and rumor to speculate. Some people at other magazines just can't seem to fathom or understand or accept how we, as creative people, can hire someone to be our publisher. *What's the big conceptual leap here, guys?* We hire someone to coordinate the release of our books!

"We have a lot of misperceptions and criticisms leveled against us because of personal rivalries. Many people don't like us on a personal level,

so they take it out on the company because it's easier. As a concept, I think Image is terrific. It has already dramatically changed the comics business."

Lee says he's frustrated at the *prima donna* label that some are trying to affix to Image creators. "One of the [critics'] biggest misconceptions is that all the guys are lazy and aren't working on their comics," he notes. "All I know is that I can contact *every* Image guy every day from my office, and they're all in their offices working. So, we're all working every day. The books take a little longer because it's *our* name on those books. At Marvel, we didn't have the option of saying, 'Let's print this on better paper,' or 'Let's do this at a better separator.' Much of that stuff looked like crap. Most of the kids didn't seem to mind, but *we* mind—I would rather have a better-looking book out every six weeks than a crappy-looking book every four weeks. Now, though, we're trying to put out a great-looking book every *four* weeks—that's our goal.

"If the biggest fault that Image has is that we're late on our titles—well, that's something we *can* improve. If the kids hated our books, it would be a very difficult thing to regain their faith, but from what I understand, the Image stuff blows out of the stores. The retailers love it when they get it, and the younger kids want to collect the new universe—they want heroes they can call their own. It's up to us to make some sacrifices and say, 'Well, maybe we have to limit ourselves to 20 or 22 pages every month, so they'll get issues every month.' The fans like our books—they're not just bagging them. In all of the letters I get, they talk about the characters, and how exciting it is to be part of a new universe. It's our first year—if this were happening a year from now, I would say we're in trouble, but this is all part of the learning process. Once we learn," he promises, "we're not going to make the *same* mistakes."

"Temporarily sidetracked by business stuff," Lee and the other Image creators are getting back to the work they all know and love.

Image is now attracting older, more established creators to their company, including Mike Grell, Jerry Ordway and even the King of Comics himself, which has Lee very excited.

"*Phantom Force* is apparently Jack Kirby's last pencilled work," says Lee. "This was originally a Bruce Lee story that has been adapted into something else. It has several characters he created. It's most of a complete issue that has been pencilled—I think some of the pages were already inked, but we're going to re-ink them and come up with a different storyline. All of us are inking a page or two. I'm inking a page, and Todd McFarlane, Rob Liefeld, Scott Williams and Marc Silvestri are inking pages. It's a benefit book—everything other than the printing and shipping costs will go to him. We're not making a single penny off of this book; it's our way of saying thanks for the riches Jack Kirby has given us."

Lee also had the chance this year to appear with other famous comics artists, including Kirby, Silvestri and Bob Kane, at a comics awards banquet on the CBS sitcom *Bob*.

"They needed a guy to come in and say some lines, so I said OK," he explains. "It was funny. I'm about 5' 3", and Marc Silvestri is about 6' 6", and they had me standing there next to him. Marc looks like he's a normal height, and I look like I'm about 2' 8" standing next to him there! They purposely did it that way, and I thought it was pretty funny. It was actually hard work, because I was sitting there doing nothing for two days; I finally got to say my line, and then that was it! I've never done anything like that before. It was interesting, but if I had to do that for a living, I would go crazy!"

He had fun, but Lee was also happy with the way the show presented comics to the general public; he hopes that *Deathblow* and other Image titles help comics become accepted by mainstream America.

"It was good exposure. Image is trying to get comics out there into the mass media instead of being a cottage industry," explains Jim Lee. "I don't care if they buy the comics, I just think it would be cool to have your big-name comic-book artists and writers as well-known as your Stephen Kings and Tom Clancys. I think that day is coming sooner than most people think. It may be the next generation, but it *will* happen!"

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"My take on Captain Glory," says Roy Thomas, "is a guy who becomes a hero just by being a line soldier."
One of the Secret City's well-trained warriors, Night Glider has been specially conditioned to take to the sky.
From Jack Kirby's fertile imagination comes a new heroic saga told by comics legends.
JACK KIRBY
"Bombast can toss an object through a keyhole," explains Jack Kirby, "as well as hurl a missile in pursuit of a supersonic plane."
All Art Courtesy Topps Comics Art: Jack Kirby

Secret City Secrets

By WILL MURRAY

The King is back! Jack "King" Kirby, who with Stan Lee virtually laid the foundation for the Marvel Age of Comics, returns to the comics scene after a hiatus of nearly a decade to launch *The Secret City Saga*.

Joining Kirby are a veritable honor roll of former colleagues plucked from his heyday at Marvel, including writers Roy Thomas, Gary Friedrich and Gerry Conway, as well as pencillers Steve Ditko, Don Heck, Dick Ayers and inker John Severin.

It sounds like the Marvel dream team reunion. It is. And yet, it's not. For these giants of the Silver Age have been reunited by Topps Comics under the editorship of ex-Marvel mainstay Jim Salicrup (CS #30).

It all begins this month—which Topps has designated as Kirby Month—with the staggered release of three one-shots, *Bombast*, *Night Glider* and *Captain Glory*, designed to lead into *The Secret City Saga* in which all three New Age superheroes will team up in a four-issue mini-series written by Thomas and drawn by Ditko.

Kirby, now retired from writing and drawing, has no plans to work directly on any of these books. Still, all four stem from his prodigious imagination—specifically from a concept he initiated in 1983. So, how did they come to Topps a decade later?

"I've been secretly doodling with ideas all these years, and they've been laying around the house," Kirby explains. "The Secret City is a source of a variety of characters and situations, and it simplifies these characters' origins."

The Secret City is all that's left of the super civilization of Gazra, which was destroyed by a man-made catastrophe 15,000 years ago. According to Kirby's premise, mankind has been destroying itself repeatedly every 15,000 years—and our civilization represents only the latest cycle. Prior to Gazra's destruction, three highly-trained warriors, a hurler, a night glider and a soldier, were placed in the Triad Cell, where they would lie in suspended animation until allowed to awaken 15,000 years hence, just before the cycle was to repeat.

"Their super civilization is rather long passed and they find themselves in a new environment," Kirby explains. "They have to contend with what the new environment has accumulated in all these thousands of years. That's what makes the story dramatic. The hi-tech jungle is not always managed by hi-tech people!"

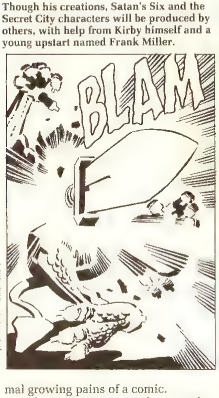
Kirby is referring to the two main villains who will plague the Secret City superheroes, General Ordiz and Dr. Roag. Also survivors of the Great Disaster, they control the mutant-spawning Gene Machine—or perhaps are controlled by *it*.

In a twist on the usual comic book formula, in which the superhero is created and supervillains rise up to challenge him, in the Secret City Saga, the supervillains are already operating in the American city that has grown up over the Secret City, Chicago, and the authorities (including Erik Larsen's Savage Dragon, who cameos in *Bombast* #1) are helpless to deal with them.

Veteran comics writer Thomas is the guiding force behind *The Secret City Saga*. In addition to scripting the main series, the *Captain Glory* one-shot and a *Secret City Saga* #0 give-away prologue drawn by Walt Simonson, he has plotted the remaining two one-shots, which he admits has led to some tricky continuity somersaults.

"Bombast awakens first," reveals Thomas, "Night Glider shortly thereafter, and then Captain Glory. All three of the one-shots end at exactly the same moment, and *The Secret City Saga* picks up one second later and goes on from there with the three of them together. Those last two or three pages have the same dialogue for all three books, but different drawings because you're seeing it from different angles. The artist would draw something that wouldn't quite match, and we ended up having to have a few things redrawn. But those are the normal growing pains of a comic.

Though his creations, Satan's Six and the Secret City characters will be produced by others, with help from Kirby himself and a young upstart named Frank Miller.



Art: Jack Kirby, Frank Miller

"They were supposed to awaken simultaneously, but there was a glitch," he adds. "What's a couple of hours over 15,000 years? These things aren't perfect! Of course, none of them know that a couple of their leaders had found their own way to survive, and had taken some perfectly good scientists and were mutating them, mind and body, into powerful creatures subservient to them."

The Secret City superheroes' original role had nothing to do with the renegade Ninth Men, as the bad guys from Gazra are called.

"Their whole mission is not to fight crime," says Thomas, "but to find out *why* civilizations have been destroying themselves about every 15,000 years and break the cycle. And that's why the Ninth Men—the society from which these heroes were sent—put them into suspended animation. Their task is to wake up our world and see if they can help us."

The world of Gazra, as envisioned by Kirby, is organically advanced, but completely without machinery. People are bred for very specific tasks in life to the point where if a person doesn't need to be mobile, he isn't! Thus, the trio find our fast-paced world baffling.

"Jack's interesting notion is a little hard to play with," Thomas admits, "since the people look like they have tape decks on them. Bombast looks like he has a microphone, which fights the idea a little bit. Basically, we were trying to get a non-mechanical world, where the technology is all based on organic material and natural things."

Bombast is, in Gazran terminology, a hurler. "Bombast is a human bomb with eyesight that would make 20/20 vision ineligible for driving a car," Kirby explains. "He can toss an object through a keyhole as well as hurl a missile in pursuit of a supersonic

SIX LOVABLE POPES FROM LIMBO, IN ORDER TO GET RID OF THEM, SATAN SENDS THEM BACK TO EARTH TO EARN THEIR PITCHFORKS!
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THE TRUTH IS—HE WON'T KILL ONE KUGA SECRETLY LOVES ANIMALS···

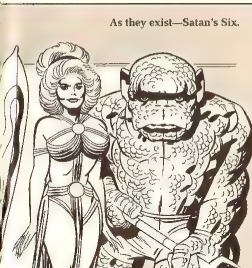
Six From Styx

Being released simultaneously with *The Secret City*, but not related to it, is the four-issue mini-series *Satan's Six*. Based on another Jack Kirby concept, it features a sextet of oddball characters who died in different historical eras and have ended up in Limbo, the afterlife for those who are denied entrance into Heaven, but aren't wicked enough to be consigned to Hell.

Led by a medieval knight, Brian Bluedragon, Satan's Six includes the sinister Dr. Mordius, the bubbly Dezira, Kuga the Lion-Killer, Hard Luck Harrigan and their overseer, Frightful, who happens to be a fiend from Hell, complete with pitchfork.

Perhaps only Jack Kirby could have come up with a series so off-the-wall. And perhaps only Jack Kirby could explain it.

As they exist—Satan's Six.


DEZIRA OF BABYLON... SHE'S TOO CUTE AND DITZY TO BE A BONAFIDE TEMPTRESS. SHE'S LIKE GOLDIE HAWN...
FRIGHTFUL-- HE'S A REAL, BONA-FIDE FIEND FROM HELL. HIS POWERS ARE AWESOME-- HE'S SENT ALONG TO KEEP THE OTHERS IN LINE. BUT HE WINDS UP HELPING THEM...

"Well, it's a satire," Kirby states. "I'm satirizing the people who are waiting in Limbo. They have nowhere to go for all time. They try to go out to do evil deeds, but these deeds turn out to be good. So, they're stuck in Limbo again. They don't know how to do anything really bad. These guys are not bad enough to go the full route."

The adventures of these Sad Sack sinners will be written by Tony Isabella and drawn by an artist new to comics, John Cleary, who pick up the story from an eight-page opening both written and drawn by the King himself. A galaxy of guest inkers, including Frank Miller, Joe Sinnott, Terry Austin, Steve Ditko, Mike Royer and Todd McFarlane, make the Kirby pages a virtual smorgasbord of legendary comics inkers. Armando Gil will ink Cleary's pages.

"John Cleary's kind of in the Todd McFarlane/Rob Liefeld school of illustration," Isabella jokes, "but I'm beating that out of him. He has a very quirky style, and it fits what we're doing with the book. I think the fans are really going to like his stuff."

Although many artists have emulated Kirby's distinctive drawing style, writing like Kirby is another matter, according to Isabella.

"I'm *not* Jack Kirby," he says. "I certainly can't approach a story the way Jack does—nor would Jack want me to. So what I got down to was the core of this thing. And the closer I got to the core, the funnier it got. Remembering how much I had always liked the little touches of humor Jack has always put into his superhero work—everything from Red and Rocky bickering in *Challengers* to the Thing wearing a Beatle wig—I decided that that was the aspect of Jack Kirby I would try to bring to the book." Isabella also expanded the bizarre premise.

"Basically, the five characters are people who made deals with the Devil, and died in a humorous manner shortly thereafter. Heaven has appealed the case. But because there are so few lawyers in Heaven, these appeals have gone on for centuries. So, you have Hell trying to trick these people into bringing others' souls to Hell and thereby losing their own. But because Hell had interfered with the appeals, Heaven is allowed to as well. The guardian angel of the group, Christine, will be on hand to steer them in the right direction."

"The Inspector, a fiend of some kind, is amused by all this," Kirby adds. "But he also finds himself helping the people from Limbo. The Devil himself is also amused by these people; he realizes they can't fulfill their destiny, because they're not fully bad."

Satan's Six operate out of a place Kirby dubbed the Groovy Ghoul, which Isabella has mercifully renamed Club Inferno. "Club Inferno is Hell's headquarters on Earth, and it's everywhere," Isabella explains. "Whatever city you're in, there's a Club Inferno. And it's all the same one. It's kind of a psychic magnet for despair. It attracts people who are on the borderline of good and evil. It draws them in so they can be seduced by Satan's Six."

Satan's Six, which will be previewed in *Secret City Saga* #0, will shuttle between telling the backstories of its members, such as Dezira and her boy friend Quasimodo, and showcasing the sextet's misguided missions.

"In a satirical framework, I think the audience will accept them," says Kirby, who has elected to let the Topps creative team bring his concept to fruition with no input or interference from him.

"When I got the eight Kirby pages," Isabella recalls, "I called up Jack and said, 'Tell me about this.' And Jack, the gracious man that he is, just said, 'Go with it. Go with it.' But I consider it *all* created by Jack Kirby, because I'm very consciously trying to approach it the way Jack might."

"At rock bottom, I'm a concept man," Kirby admits, "and what I can do is deliver concepts and have a variety of people create the stories from them. I'm a lot older now. Let's face it, I'm at an age where you're more or less retired, and you don't do as much as you did in your younger days."

On the subject of whether or not he misses drawing comics, Jack Kirby is characteristically blunt. "After you've done it all, no. Believe me, I've done every kind of superhero you can think of, or any kind of concept you can think of. I draw pictures for my wife, pictures for my friends, but I relegate it to that particular part of my life. I don't think that there's anything left that I haven't drawn."

—*Will Murray*

plane. Bombast never misses, but still he may come up against villains who will stop his powers in some manner."

The only female character, dubbed Glida by Kirby and rechristened Night Glider by Thomas, is capable of riding the air currents like a human kite thanks to hollow bones and a special costume.

"Glida is her real name and Night Glider is a division name, like parachutist," Thomas relates. "Just like Bombast, she had been trained beyond what these people had been in the days of the Ninth Men. She is more agile and her bones have been lightened. She has an experimental costume with organic wings that almost seems to heal itself."

YOU DON'T GET IT, DO YOU...
WHAM!
YOU CAN'T BEAT THE BAHAMUT!
WHAM!
UHHHHUH!
IT'S NO USE! MY WEAPONS ARE USELESS! I'M DOOMED NOW... OR I'M RAVISHED!

Art: Dick Ayers/John Severin

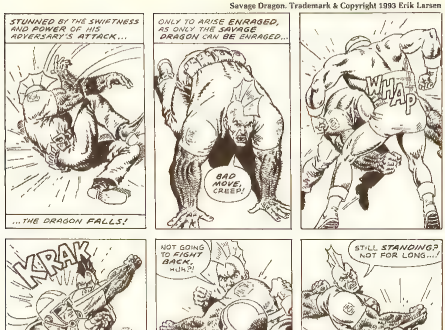
The resemblance between Night Glider's costume and that of the Inhumans' Black Bolt is strictly coincidence, says Kirby.

"It's supposed to blend with nightfall," he adds, "and that's a big help to her. When the villains pursue her, she can blend in with the night sky."

At first glance, Captain Glory, the last to awaken but the team's leader, appears to be another of Kirby's trade-

With a cameo by the Savage Dragon, *Bombast* #1 introduces the character to a familiar city, but a questionable time.

Savage Dragon. Trademark & Copyright 1993 Erik Larsen


STUNNED BY THE SWIFTNESS AND POWER OF HIS ADVERSARY'S ATTACK...
...THE DRAGON FALLS!
ONLY TO ARISE ENRAGED, AS ONLY THE SAVAGE DRAGON CAN BE ENRAGED...
BAD MOVE, CREEP!
WHAP
KRAK
NOT GOING TO FIGHT BACK, HUH?
WHOK
YOU'RE MAKING WAY FOR EASIER.
(BY GAZRA! THIS TENTH MAN IS STRONGER THAN I AM!)
STILL STANDING? NOT FOR LONG...
WOK
(CAN'T TAKE MUCH MORE! HAVE TO TWINK... ACT!)
(BUT HE'S RELENTLESS...)
WHUMP
(THE ANCIENTS DIDN'T DESIGN WE FOR HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT, BUT IS THAT IS THE WAY OF THIS CIVILIZATION...)
(...THEN I MUST ADAPT MYSELF AND MY SKILLS TO IT!)

Art: Dick Ayers/John Severin

In suspended animation until now, the Secret City warriors are trying to stop the Earth's latest cycle of destruction.

mark patriotic characters in the tradition of Captain America and Fighting American. But this is incidental, according to Thomas.

"Captain Glory is a media invention in our world," he points out. "But he does have a rank that's more or less captain. It's more like Wonder Woman, in a way. It was a weird coincidence that Wonder Woman just happened to be wearing stars and stripes, and an eagle. Things like eagles and primary colors are simply recurring themes in most civilizations, so it's not too much of a stretch to think that he has accidentally hit upon some key themes.

"My take on Captain Glory," Thomas continues, "is simply that he's a guy who becomes a hero just by being a line soldier, and was immediately promoted. The good news is that you're about to become an officer. The bad news is the world is about to come to an end. And you're going to have an army of a whole *two* other people with which to try to save the world 15,000 years in the future. He's a little beyond Captain America in strength—somewhere between Captain America and the Hulk."

Although the protagonists are limited to those three, Kirby did create a fourth survivor, a young boy called the Whiz Kid, and Thomas holds out the possibility that he will play a larger role in the series at some point.

"He's a character we established in *Secret City* #0, who falls into a chasm just as the Great Catastrophe hits. The idea is there's another person who survives, but who doesn't have any kind of mission. He's not trained for anything. He's just a lucky kid. And he has a whole other perspective."

Thomas admits he was attracted to this project more for personal reasons and the rare opportunity of working with old friends than due to any compelling creative motive. His co-author on *Bombast* is Friedrich, whom Thomas brought into comics, and Conway, another old crony, is scripting *Night Glider*.

"These are people I had worked with in some of my very earliest assignments," Thomas notes. "I dialogued a couple of Steve Ditko's Dr. Strange stories. There's Dick Ayers, with whom I worked on *Sergeant Fury*, and Don Heck, with whom I had done my first *Avengers*. I've been a big admirer of Jack Kirby since the days of Simon & Kirby. This was a project that smacked of the days when Jack was a major influence in the field. It just became a personally appealing kind of thing, like somebody who wants to put on the old uniform and play another few innings."

The analogy may be very apt. If the series continues beyond Topps' seven-issue plan, Thomas, a Chicago Cubs fan, plans to have Bombast join the Cubs and pitch for them in a World Series!

It remains to be seen how the fast-changing comics market of 1993 will react to Topps' retro-Marvel project, but Jack Kirby himself is confident. He's also taking a hands-off approach to all the activity swirling around his latest gift to comics.

"I'm just going to let them do what they have in mind," he says. "I respect the Topps people. It's a fine outfit. You'll have the top men working on these things. They're all wonderful writers and artists, and I admire them greatly. Wherever the concepts take them, they'll certainly do it right."

In the 10 years since Kirby first conceived the Secret City, the world has changed dramatically, with the threat of nuclear war very much reduced. Does the writer/artist see the world of 1993 as having become significantly safer?

"No, it hasn't," he asserts. "In fact, it's even more dangerous, because you have these different countries and religions who have access to plutonium and destructive weapons. So, we just have to live with our fingers crossed, the way I see it. Holy wars are the most dangerous of all. The concept of complete wipeouts can't be ruled out."

However, Jack Kirby is quick to add, "I doubt if Armageddon will ever really come. People *will* survive. But not the world we have today." CS

On a very low budget, the Fantastic Four zoom quickly into the Movie Zone.

By MARC SHAPIRO

Alex Hyde-White loves understatement. And there's not a better target for the actor's verbal sleight-of-hand than his current project, Concorde Pictures' *The Fantastic Four*.

"This has to be one of this studio's grander endeavors," chuckles Hyde-White, who's stretching out as Mr. Fantastic. "The budget on this film is definitely bigger than a breadbox."

How much bigger is the question on the very last night of filming this long-anticipated film adaptation of the World's Greatest Comics Magazine, created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby more than 30 years ago. This Marvel Comics-based movie is shooting at Roger Corman's Venice, CA studio.

That's right! This is a Roger Corman film! But before hardcore FF fanatics cry foul, weep cheap or hold their heads in horror, be advised: *The Fantastic Four* is Corman's grand experiment, an attempt at making something bigger than, well, a breadbox.

Corman and producer Steve Rabiner, with Marvel's Lee and co-production partners Neue Constantin Productions' blessing, have upped the usual Concorde ante on several elements. *The Fantastic Four* features a frontline crew, director Oley (*Bloodfist 3: Forced to Fight*) Sassone and actors, Alex (*Indiana Jones & the Last Crusade*) Hyde-White and Jay (*The Boy Who Could Fly*) Underwood and FX houses (Optic Nerve and Billups Communications) of a higher-than-normal pedigree. Throw in a $4 million budget and the luxury (by Concorde standards) of a 25-day shooting schedule, and there may actually be a movie here. Yes, it's no wonder that watching Sassone direct his *FF* crew, (which includes Rebecca Staab and Michael Bailey Smith) in hot spacesuits, in a wooden mockup of a spaceship through a backlit universe, is quite literally like a journey into the unknown.

It's a novelty that isn't lost on *The Fantastic Four* cast and crew.

"They're definitely not used to five-week shoots at this studio," Hyde-White admits. "They're also not used to doing films on this kind of scale."

"This is double the budget of *any* Roger Corman movie *ever* made," gleefully reports Scott Billups, whose company is handling the film's computer-generated FX. "And that's probably why you don't see Roger hanging around the set. Because I'm sure the budget is giving him ulcers."

"We had nine days of outdoor filming scheduled, and of course this was

Introduced with a college prologue, Reed (Hyde-White), Ben Grimm (Michael Bailey Smith) and Victor von Doom (Joseph Culp) are students and professor discussing Colossus Ray possibilities.

the month it rained *every* day," winces producer Rabiner, "and so we had to do a lot of scrambling around trying to set up indoor scenes we could shoot. This isn't the company that's going to wait around doing nothing until the rain stops."

Rabiner, who's wincing less and smiling more with *The Fantastic Four* in the home stretch, is well aware of an unstated curse that has dogged the film adaptations of almost every Marvel hero, from *Howard the Duck* to *Captain America* and *The Punisher*. Most Marvel characters that get optioned (like the Silver Surfer, Ghost Rider, Blade) don't get made. And those that *do*, don't get made all that well. Rabiner feels *The Fantastic Four* will break that dreaded cycle.

"What we're doing—that I believe those other pictures *failed* at—is mixing the comic-book attitude with real human emotion," he explains. "We're not getting fancy or trying to explore a dark side of *The Fantastic Four*.

"We know that the audience for this film will, for the most part, be the people who've followed the comic for 30 years. They're going to expect a certain thing and that's what we're going to give them."

The Fantastic Four, scripted by Craig J. Nevius and Kevin Rock, is, according to Rabiner, "the group's genesis. We start with these people in college, then we flash forward 10 years as they become astronauts and encounter the Colossus Ray in space which turns them into the Fantastic Four. They then turn their attention toward the film's two villains, Dr. Doom and the Jeweler (the latter a last-minute bit of artistic license, replacing the Mole Man)."

Its storyline loosely follows the initial Lee-Kirby *FF* tales, with key details altered (as most fans will note). Early on, the Fantastic Four are students at a major university where they are unwittingly helping their science professor, a madman bent on world domination through environmental and physical change, harness the power of the Colossus Ray. A lab accident supposedly kills the professor, but actually transforms him into Dr. Doom. Years later, the Fantastic Four, unaware that their demented mentor is now Doom, have become astronauts. They're continuing his experiments to harness the Colossus Ray. But Doom, aided by the Jeweler, tampers with their onboard ship apparatus, and the near-fatal result is an encounter with the ray in space, transforming the team into the Fantastic Four. Coming to grips with their newfound powers and their continued bickering and emotional conflicts aren't their only problems. There's still Dr. Doom to confront.

Hyde-White heads the cast as Reed Richards. Rebecca Staab fades in as Susan Storm. Underwood portrays Johnny Storm. Michael Bailey Smith plays the human Ben Grimm while actor/stuntman Carl Ciarfalio gets inside the Thing suit. Joseph Culp waxes evil as Dr. Doom, as does Ian Trigger who is the Jeweler. Kat Green plays Ben's blind love interest Alicia Masters.

The film's making concludes a six-year odyssey in which Neue Constantin Productions, the company responsible for *The Name of the Rose* and *Das Boot* and which owned the *FF*

Ready to take on the big screen, the Thing (Carl Ciarfalio), Susan Storm (Rebecca Staab), Reed Richards (Alex Hyde-White) and Johnny Storm (Jay Underwood) team-up as the Fantastic Four.

movie rights, attempted to put the film together to no avail.

"They were basically looking for the perfect deal," chronicles Rabiner. "20th Century Fox was serious about doing it. Chris Columbus [comics fan, *Gremlins* writer, *Home Alone* director] was attached for a while to direct. It was going to be a huge picture but, as these things often do, it all fell apart. Instead of a major studio, a huge budget and a major director, they had *nothing* and their rights were expiring.

"So, they asked themselves, 'Who do we know who can make this movie *fast* before our rights expire?' And they said, 'Roger Corman's company.' So, they met with Roger and myself and they said, 'This is what we want to do: can you get it going by the year's end?' We said, 'Sure, no problem.' "

Rabiner, in hindsight, concedes that while there was no problem, Concorde and those connected with the movie had to do some quick studying regarding *FF* lore before Nevius attempted to make script sense of a treatment submitted by Neue Constantin and Stan Lee. Rock later rewrote the Nevius script.

"We read a lot of Marvel back issues and the *Official Marvel Handbook* on the Fantastic Four. People on this project weren't raving lanatics about *Fantastic Four*, but we've all had *some*

Fantastic Four Characters ™ and ® & copyright 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group

All Fantastic Four Film Photos Courtesy New World Pictures

"I had to know if Dr. Doom [Culp] was in it," says director Oley Sassone. "When I was told yes, I said, 'Man, I'm there.' "

The Jeweler (Ian Trigger), a last-minute Mole Man replacement, holds the ace in the form of Alicia Masters (Kat Green). Ben Grimm's love interest.

contact with the comics and the cartoon series. So, ultimately, we knew enough to say, 'Oh no, Sue Storm would never do that' or, 'That's the kind of person Reed is.' "

The producer stops short of describing this *Fantastic Four* as a literal adaptation of the comic, citing differences between live action and the printed page as the reasons to restructure to a certain degree.

"But in terms of their backstory and how these characters interact with each other, the idea has always been to make this the *Fantastic Four* that everybody knows and loves."

Rabiner claims that casting this movie was a mixed chore. "On the one hand, we knew *exactly* what we were looking for; we needed certain looks and personalities. And that made it hard, because we saw many good actors who were not these characters. Visually, we knew what these characters had to be, so there was no room to say, 'Well, it doesn't have to be like that' because it *did* have to be like that. No one character was easy to cast, but once we finished casting, we knew we had just the right people."

Oley Sassone is one of the few people connected to the project who had a real handle on *The Fantastic Four*. And so when Concorde approached him, the director had only one stipulation.

"I had to know if Dr. Doom was in it," says Sassone after wrapping the spaceship sequences, and while crew members prep a mock rooftop on an outdoor studio location. "When I was told yes, I said, 'Man, I'm right there.' "

Sassone, whose directorial credits include *The Final Embrace* and a slew of music videos for the likes of Eric Clapton and others, is looking a bit fatigued on this last night of filming. Storyboarding all the action sequences has helped a great deal. But he admits that a small budget and not enough time has added to the pressure he's feeling.

"Not only is there pressure to make a good film, but there's the pressure of knowing that there are *FF* fans out there, people who've been fans of the comics for 30 years, who will be the toughest critics. Obviously, I want to make an entertaining film for as wide an audience as possible, but nearly 100 percent of the people who'll see this movie will be fans of the comic. So, I've really got to deliver the goods."

One way the director is attempting to do just that is by incorporating an array of "tilt shots, extreme close-ups and dramatic lighting and shadows" that approximate "the angles in the comic books.

"But for me, the biggest challenge has been to look past the special FX and the tricks and to concentrate on the characters. In a way it's easy, because the complexity of these characters and their problems, emotions and feelings already exist. As a director, all I'm doing is peeling the skin back and looking for ways to bring those qualities to the screen.

"There are many strong individual moments in this film: When these people discover they're not human beings anymore, when the Thing must deal with the emotions pent up inside him. The FX will take care of themselves. It's the characters you have to feel something for."

Burlap! God, how I hate burlap!" chuckles Jay Underwood, as he glances at the spacesuit lying crumpled on his dressing room floor. "It must have been 100 degrees in that thing and we were on that spaceship set for a couple of hours!"

Underwood, in the midst of a late-night adrenaline rush following the spaceship sequences, laughs at the range of emotions on display.

"It has been real crazy and real testy at times. We've had those moments, even though everybody has really been great and gotten along. Besides, it's not like we were walking onto this show and didn't know what to expect."

Underwood, who agreed to dye his hair blonde in keeping with the Johnny Storm persona, describes his fiery counterpart as "the ideal all-American boy. He's young, he's high-energy. And because of that, he tends to rush into things that create turmoil within the Fantastic Four."

First donning the recognizable costume, Hyde-White recalls "being immediately and immensely happy." What Reed and Sue (Staab) face, however, may not reciprocate that feeling.

The actor, who has previously graced the genre in *The Boy Who Could Fly* and as "The Kryptonite Kid" on *Superboy*, says his blue and white spandex outfit is "pretty cool.

"But I remember the very first day I had it on. It was the first day of filming and we were shooting Reed and Sue's wedding in an outdoor location. There were all these extras around and I was wearing a bathrobe over my costume. I was very reluctant to take it off. I was definitely feeling a little self-conscious about it at first. But you get used to it."

Underwood agrees with the idea that his alter-ego, the Human Torch, has been a physical challenge even though the more fiery aspects are all created optically.

"All the flame effects are computer-generated or done with puppets. Real fire *never* comes near me. When a Torch thing is called for, I just kind of wind up and make a throwing motion like I'm throwing fire and that flame is cut in optically.

"What has really been tough is trying to imitate Johnny's weird contortions and body language. You look at the comics and one motion could take up a whole page of frames. But we're doing this live and so I have to bounce around in one motion and really give this life."

Comics' favorite siblings, Johnny and Sue Storm (Underwood and Staab) fight side-by-side, and with his "high energy," sparks—or flames—are sure to fly.

Photo: Courtesy Everett Burrell

"The main gig" within the movie's FX, according to Optic Nerve's Everett Burrell, the Thing costume (worn by stuntman Ciarfalio) had to "be better than a Ninja Turtle for very low money."

Supposedly killed in a lab accident, Victor von Doom (Colp) returns to haunt the Four's existence.

The first day Alex Hyde-White put on his Fantastic Four costume and assumed the identity of Reed Richards, he describes his mood as "being immediately and immensely happy.

"It was like coming full circle. Fifteen years ago, I came to Hollywood to do *Battlestar Galactica* and that made me an actor. And now 15 years later, I'm in *The Fantastic Four* and, who knows, this might end up making me a star."

Hyde-White, during a dinner break and between bites of fast food, is seriously considering a future with Mr. Fantastic as he plays with a plastic Reed Richards doll, one of many pieces of *FF* memorabilia (toys, followed closely by comics) that appear, like good luck omens, all over the set.

"I suppose I'll know that I'm in for a bit of a run with this character when I see Reed Richards dolls in the store with my color hair," he laughs.

The part came up after what he recalls as "one phone call, one meeting. I went in and read and felt I pretty much had the look."

But the actor, whose other genre credits include a bit part in the *Captain America* TV pilot, didn't stop with merely landing the role. He did his homework.

"My memories of the Fantastic Four were basically from the cartoon series," he explains, "so I had to do some work to come up to speed on the character. So, I went back to the comics and did a bit of work on Old Reed.

"And I discovered his internal struggle. He's always wondering if he's doing the right thing by everybody in any given situation. He has a pretty deep way of doing things and relating to people. On the surface, you would have to wonder how he and Susan even get along, let alone get married. There's a lot of 'mental' in Reed and that has made for a lot of work for me."

But the actor reports that, based on his experience, *Fantastic Four* hasn't been a rushed situation. "Oley knows *exactly* what he's doing and exactly what he wants. There hasn't been much pressure to accept an early take, which has given the actors much more room to play around with their roles. There isn't that feeling on the set that we have to hurry along and get it done quickly. So far we've managed to avoid the pitfalls of most low-budget films."

And in the process, to Hyde-White's way of thinking, they've created some legitimate film moments.

"There's a scene in the lab where we all get together and attempt to hash out things that are bothering us and why we are the way we are. It was a strong scene for Reed. His stature as a mature teacher who the others tend to look up to and follow really came through.

"I was also quite happy with my first stretching sequence, in the scene after the space shuttle crashes and I stop Susan from impaling herself on a piece of debris. Combining my own arm with a hydraulic arm and finally computer-generated opticals took a lot of concentration. But what I really

"She falls in love with this guy who turns into a rock creature," Green says of Alicia Masters. "She's definitely *not* boring."

liked about the scene was that it forced me to play the sudden psychological rush that goes through Reed when he discovers he has this power. Playing a character who doesn't like surprises and who's suddenly forced to deal with the surprise of his life is a real tall order for any actor."

Hyde-White continues to toss the Reed Richards doll back and forth as he explains his view of the superhero with the shock of grey hair.

"Reed's a highly moral fellow. Children love him. He probably goes to church," the actor smiles. "He's like the Al Gore of superheroes."

Hyde-White heads off to the makeup trailer, where a fresh coat of Reed Richards grey is applied to his hair. Optic Nerve's Everett Burrell is readying the Dr. Doom armor and the Thing suit for the upcoming rooftop sequence. Scott Billups is off in a far corner of the Concorde lot, shooting some second-unit Thing business, minus both the actor and stuntman, that will be computer-enhanced later. Billups, fresh off a pre-production stint on *Jurassic Park*, is enthusiastic about what he feels is his good fortune in landing this assignment.

"I usually work on big pictures with big budgets, and then I usually only get pieces to do where there are problems with other FX and they need something to bridge them. This is the first time I've been able to create a whole group of FX from scratch."

It helps that Billups is enthusiastic. It also helps that he was familiar with the comic. Because, in typical Roger Corman fashion, the FX man didn't have a whole lot of time to prepare.

"I had *two days* of pre-production," he laughs. "Fortunately, what was required was basic desktop computer technology. We're basically doing this film by hand, but we're doing it by hand with super-computers."

Billups ticks off his *Fantastic Four* secrets, beginning with Reed Richards' stretching powers.

"Alex does the basic arm motion, continues the thrusting motion as if he's stretching and then goes to where his arm is going to stretch out to. Then, we take a series of frames of his forearm and retouch and composite them to give them the stretching look. Johnny Storm's flame is pyrotechnics at the beginning and the end with computer-generated particle systems. Susan Storm's fade is a simple dissolve composite and Ben Grimm as the Thing is your basic morphing effect."

Billups is aware of the movie's low budget nature, but claims that the *Fantastic Four* won't have the typical low-budget look. "For the money and the schedule, this film is going to have a very big look to it."

Helping out in the big look is Optic Nerve who, says Burrell, took the *FF* bait based on reputation alone. "There were many houses bidding on this movie even though it was a Roger Corman film. It had the potential to be a really interesting gig."

Optic Nerve's major *FF* assignment was the Thing suit. Burrell explains its importance by saying, "It was the main gig, it really had to sell.

"We knew it had to be as good, if not better, than a Ninja Turtle for very low money. It's your basic sculpted suit, but we got lucky in that its rocky texture made it easier to hide things like seams and joints. We did the Dr. Doom armor, which was vacuformed and sculpted. And we also did Reed Richards' stretching arm, which is pneumatically controlled and blends in with the computer-generated FX."

And the inspiration for the *FF* work? "We went to the source," Burrell declares. "We went to the comics."

When Kat Green landed the part of Alicia Masters, she followed the lead of the other *FF* actors and read the comics. She wasn't thrilled with what she read.

"My character in the comics didn't have a whole lot of depth," says Green, who's making her motion picture debut. "She was pretty much the damsel in distress. Only when it's revealed that her father is the Puppetmaster and we get her history do we finally see that, although Alicia is very feminine and innocent, she also has a strength in her."

Green, however, believes that what she liked about Alicia in the comics has carried over to the film.

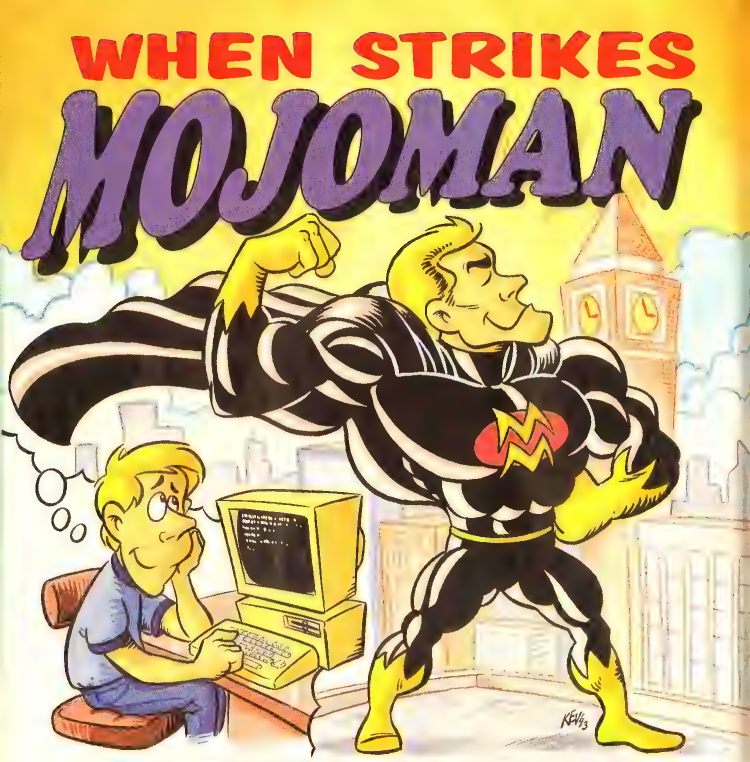
"She definitely has the biggest arc. There are lots of changes and transitions. She's blind. She falls in love with this guy who turns into a rock creature. She's definitely *not* boring."

Michael Bailey Smith sort of stumbled into the role of the troubled Ben Grimm. He says, "They already had somebody in mind for the part, but decided to look at other people anyway. I came in and they took one look at me, and said my look was perfect."

Unfortunately for Smith, a former pro football player with the Dallas Cowboys and currently an actor/computer programmer, the Thing suit had already been completed. There wasn't time to make another Thing, so Smith is restricted to playing the human Ben Grimm and giving continuity direction to the man in the suit. But otherwise, Smith claims the role

(continued on page 65)

WHEN STRIKES MOJOMAN



On a secret fact-finding mission, the mysterious avenger discovers what's less than super about the hero biz.

By MICHAEL WOLFF/
Illustrated by KEVIN BROCKSCHMIDT

I would be lying if I didn't admit that, on many an occasion, I've harbored a desire to become a costumed crimefighter. Especially after sitting back and watching blind lawyers, playboy philanthropists and genetic accidents go out and battle injustice. I felt as if I was being left out.

Sure, I didn't possess superpowers, but I kept thinking that it wouldn't be all that hard to throw together some kind of costume and go out to fight crime. My inability to leap over tall buildings at a single bound was certainly a handicap, but I reasoned that I wouldn't be going up against the sort of high-powered evil that regularly roamed through the comic books. Your average Southeast Texas crook, keeping an eye out for a patrol car or occasional helicopter, would hardly be expecting a black-clad figure to come swooping out from the shadows. The initial sight of me alone would probably unnerve the poor jerk enough to where I could employ some sort of clever crime-stopping idea. A convenient fire extinguisher perhaps, or an equally effective kick to certain sensitive areas.

On paper, the idea couldn't miss, but I decided, nonetheless, to go even

further and carefully research the physical, legal and social ramifications of such a step. After all, not only was I interested in the possibilities of becoming a superhero, but it occurred to me that there could be others out there who would be equally interested in knowing what to expect before they decided to take up cape and cowl and go out for a moonlit drive.

For the purpose of carrying out my research, I found it necessary to establish a super-identity of my own. This is not to say, of course, that I actually succeeded in becoming an amateur crimefighter. As you shall soon see, what works in comics doesn't necessarily form the norm in real life.

I took on the identity of The Amazing Mojoman: Scourge of Evil & Champion of Justice. My costume consisted of a black turtleneck with matching pants, socks and shoes. All of this was accented by a flowing black cape, as well as a pair of swimming goggles which served as a mask. Not exactly on a par with Batman's outfit or Matter-Eater Lad's, but my philosophy has always been to simplify whenever possible.

Besides, the cape was a gift from my wife.

Speaking of which, I'll pass on what I feel is a key ingredient to the success or failure of any superhero:

The Cape.

I'm serious. It's one thing to walk around in a black turtleneck and swimming goggles, but when you put on that cape, and the night air makes it swirl about behind you, something clicks inside your head. You actually start believing that you *can* leap over rooftops or take on a crowd of thugs bigger than yourself.

Which will probably explain why, when your battered body is brought into the morgue, you're wearing a peculiar grin on your face.

Other than my costume, my only affectation was the battle cry of *Hwah!* This monosyllabic *kiai*, yelled loud enough when I lept into action, would doubtless scare any crook senseless when accompanied by the hopefully fearsome sight of me coming at him from out of the night.

Let me emphatically point out that Mojoman was an *unpowered* superhero. I wanted to look into the tribulations and efforts of being a costumed crimefighter without the unfair advantage of superpowers. Mojoman was to move and fight on wits alone ("a razor-sharp mind against the ratlike thoughts of the Underworld").

Moving to the first problem: Do any of you have the slightest idea as to how long it takes to change from street clothes into a superhero outfit?

I do. It takes me exactly 31 seconds to change from Michael Wolff into Mojoman. This is after much practice, as well as assuming that I've got plenty of room to move around in.

Thirty-one seconds. Just over half a minute. How this might affect my capability as a crimefighter will be illustrated later on, but one of the reasons I bring the subject up is because I've read where it took Michael Keaton 20 minutes to change into Batman. Twenty minutes! He's still pulling his boots on and I'm ready to combat Evil *tout de suite*. This is something that you should consider when contemplating the superhero business.

Also, have you any idea what you'll look like when you wear a superhero suit under street clothes? Think of a badly packed sausage. Anyone wanting to become a superhero should resign him or herself to dressing as casually as possible. Kiss those tight designer jeans *adios*.

I would also advise investing in an extra-strength brand of deodorant.

Then, there's the problem of actually finding a place to change clothes for action. Go to the average pay phone and ask yourself why Superman hasn't ducked into a booth lately. And have you tried to change clothes in a bathroom stall? In 31 seconds? It's not recommended for the faint of heart, I assure you.

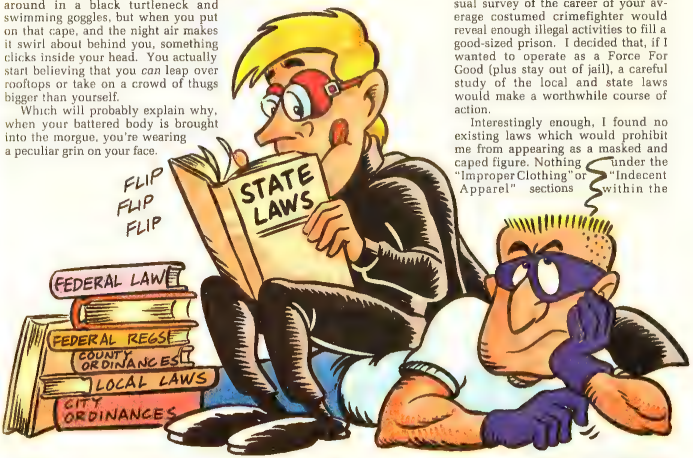
So, here we have the major reasons why Mojoman Walked By Night. Not only does most crime tend to conveniently take place during the evening hours, but there are more places to change clothes when it's dark. It's also cooler at night, which is important when you're trying to sneak up on someone who's downwind of you.

The next problem was one which shows up very seldom in regards to most superheroes.

The Law!

It's surprising, I admit, but a casual survey of the career of your average costumed crimefighter would reveal enough illegal activities to fill a good-sized prison. I decided that, if I wanted to operate as a Force For Good (plus stay out of jail), a careful study of the local and state laws would make a worthwhile course of action.

Interestingly enough, I found no existing laws which would prohibit me from appearing as a masked and caped figure. Nothing under the "Improper Clothing" or "Indecent Apparel" sections within the



Indecency & Obscenity Codes seemed to apply to the actual business of running around in full superhero regalia. And considering some of the things I've seen passed off as "fashion," Mojoman wasn't in any real danger.

So much for form. What about content? If I went out as Mojoman and, in the course of my duties, I caught someone in the act of robbing a convenience store, then how legal would my arrest be?

According to the *Texas Statutes & Codes*, Article 14.01 ("Code of Criminal Procedure"), Section A ("Offense Within View"), a peace officer *or any other person* may, without a warrant, arrest an offender when the offense is committed in his presence or within his view, if the offense is one classed as a felony or as an offense against the public peace.

There. An arrest by Mojoman is legal *if* it is determined that the target in question is committing a definite crime. The only problem worth considering is the fact that a person invoking a citizen's arrest runs the risk of being charged with false arrest. If I decided to leap into action, then I would have to be *certain* that a genuine crime was being committed.

My intervention as Mojoman would be no different than, say, the bystander who pursued and tripped a purse snatcher. The important thing here is that I would be wearing an unusual outfit and, when later questioned, I would give my name as Mojoman. If pressed for details, I would say, "The Amazing Mojoman."

But here's the clincher. If the police were nearby, and we happened to bust up a crime together, then they would be within their rights to demand that I *unmask* and give my real name. If I refused, then I would risk ending up in the same clink as the guys I helped bring to ground. The reason: My hiding my real identity could be legally interpreted as an obstruction of justice. The police might require a statement from Michael Wolff to help them hold onto the crooks. Any statement I made as Mojoman could be thrown out of court since, technically, Mojoman doesn't legally exist.

The point is any superhero runs the risk of being legally unmasked if he or she should have a run-in with the law. It therefore becomes a good idea to maintain some sort of distance from the authorities if you want to keep your cape flying free.

Or you could try to make your super-identity a legal entity. Article 2.12, Section 8 of the *Texas Statutes & Codes*, defines a peace officer as "any private person specially appointed to execute criminal process."

Of course, there's the hurdle of actually becoming "specially appointed." Try to imagine the look on a Chief of Police's face when you walk into his office, decked out in your costume, and politely ask to be deputized.

Yet, as a recognized peace officer, you would be required to obey the laws which every policeman is required to follow. How far would the Question or the Punisher get if they had to pay heed to criminal process? How embarrassing would it be if you were arrested for brutality while in the process of fighting crime?

Then, there's also the problem of weapons. You may feel that you'll need to carry around some sort of club, knife, gun, repulsor ray or cobalt bomb, but I would advise against it. Mojoman goes around unarmed for two reasons. One: I'm afraid of shooting my foot off, and two: I've learned that the local authorities tend to frown on people who brandish harmful objects about in an uncivilized manner.

I should point out, however, that, according to the *Statutes & Codes*, an individual is exempt from being prosecuted for carrying a concealed weapon *if he is a recognized law officer wearing a distinctive uniform.*

Something to consider.

So, how effective would Mojoman be if suddenly called upon? Let's set up a problem which finds me strolling along the sidewalks of downtown Houston on a typical evening. Imagine me in my street clothes, cleverly disguised as a badly packed sausage, with my Mojoman duds hidden beneath.

Suddenly, a cry for help reaches my ears. "*Succor! O Desperation!*"

I whirl about to see what the matter could be. Across the street is a Young Lass being accosted by a Rowdy. There's no time to waste. If Our Heroine is to be saved, then Mojoman must bound into action with the speed of a gazelle.

All right, let's break this down.

First, I must find a place to change clothes. Downtown Houston is notorious for its lack of convenient alleys and back streets. No phone booths or convenient dumpsters.[1] A dressing room would be the answer, and a de-

partment store is handily nearby. Quickly, I rush through the doors and race up the escalators to the Men's Clothing Department on the fourth floor. Total time: three minutes and 45 seconds.

Then, I change into Mojoman. Thirty-one seconds.

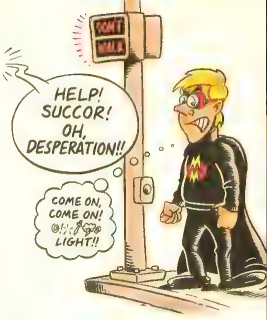
I rush through four floors of a fashionable Houston department store in my Mojoman outfit, trying mightily not to attract too much attention. Four minutes and 20 seconds.

So, I'm back where I started, only now as Mojoman. Now I have to cross the street. Since no one, but *no one* jaywalks Main Street in Houston without the risk of ending up as a hood ornament, I rush to the corner, wait for the cross light and go over to the other side. Maximum time: one minute and 10 seconds.

I finally rush over to where the Dastardly Deed is being committed. Let's say... five seconds.

Hwah!

Total time of operation: nine minutes and 51 seconds from Michael Wolff to *Hwah!* Nine minutes and 51 seconds. I'm still ahead of Michael Keaton by almost 10 minutes, but in that time, the Rowdy could've had his way with Our Heroine and gone off to order a reuben from the deli before having to meet my onslaught. Of course, being Mojoman, I could give hot pursuit to the culprit, but the sight of my caped form racing down the sidewalk would probably be enough to send the Rowdy running (laughing all the way). And with everyone's attention focused on a black-clad figure running about, who would notice an ordinary attacker in civilian street-punk clothes slipping away? A caped Scourge of Evil is more interesting than an old-fashioned mugger.



I created Mojoman several years ago for the purposes of research. Since then, I've found that little has changed. The overall problem is not in making a costumed identity work, but in whether or not the person inside the costume has what it takes when the deal goes down. If all it took to be a superhero was a costume, then we would be up to our armpits in Mojomen. Courage and all the heroic stances in the world won't stop a bullet, or keep me from getting creamed by some 80-ton redneck with a fist the size of a fork-lift.

Consider that there are already groups of costumed crimefighters out stopping crooks. They're called police and, like their cousins in the comic books, they get to wear distinctive uniforms and drive flashy vehicles. They sign on to take chances and stand against the Forces of Evil. Having a costumed identity doesn't make them any less human, plus they've had special training, as well as access to more equipment than Mojoman will ever get to use in his career.

It could be said that the main reason many superheroes take up the business is because they feel that the police are ineffective, and that laws

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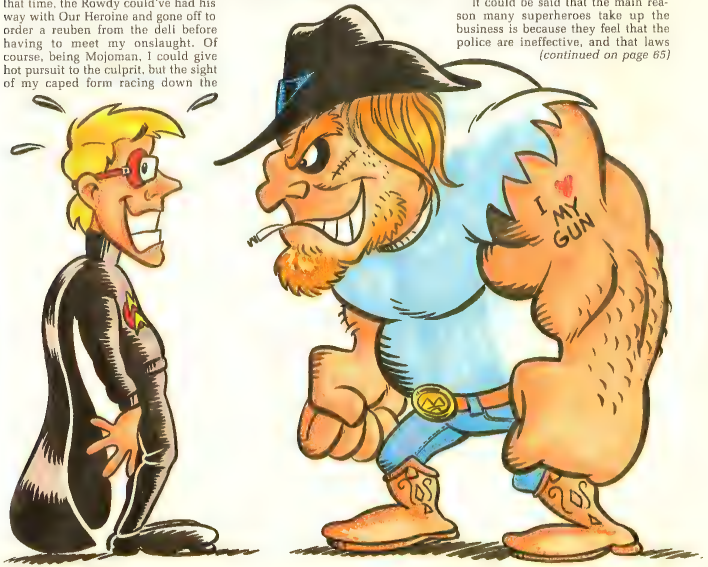
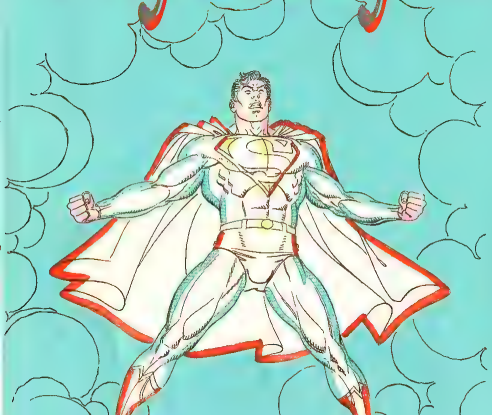


Mystery of Steel

According to Mike Carlin, the only thing left certain regarding Superman is taxes.

By MAUREEN McTIGUE



Art: Jerry Ordway

"Superman was first, and he should be foremost," says editor Mike Carlin matter-of-factly. "We went to a very far extreme and we *saved* Superman. It put him in the newspapers, it put him back on people's minds, it made people talk about him. Hopefully, this will also be talked about."

"This" is the "Reign of the Supermen" storyline in Carlin's four monthly titles—*Action Comics*, *The Adventures of Superman*, *Superman* and *Man of Steel*—which introduces four characters all proclaiming to be the (until now) quite-dead Superman.

"It's a little bit of a drag to have to go to such an extreme to get people to notice. Our problem right now is that we can only do that trick once," Carlin laughs.

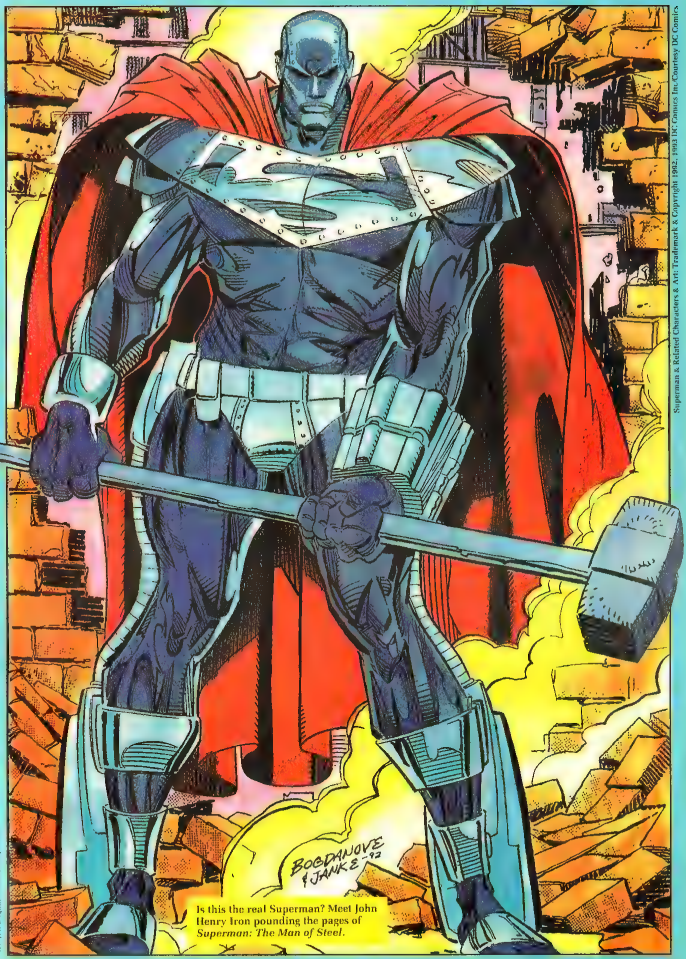
Trick though it may be, the death of Superman is still one of comics' most-talked-about events. But what led up to it may not seem all that grand. "We have meetings every year to decide what's going to happen in the year afterwards, what's coming up. This isn't the first Superman meeting where somebody said, 'Let's kill him off'; this is not the first meeting or plotting session I've gone to on any character where they said, 'Let's kill him.' I mean, that happens in life and that happens in comics.

"At the meeting, we had planned to do another story, but due to extenuating circumstances, we had to push that back a little bit and then we had to fill that gap. So, somebody said, 'Let's kill Superman.' "

Taken as is, the Doomsday storyline could be interpreted as a filler story, but that's not quite true, according to Carlin. "We have to fill the racks every month and that's the assignment. It's not fine art where you do it when you feel like it; it's commercial art and you have to do it *on command*. We would have had to put out a story anyway. Every story we do, no matter how crummy it turns out, when it started, we think it's going to be an interesting story. Hopefully, new readers will come and try it. This, obviously, we knew would be a big deal. We didn't just say, 'Let's kill him' and say, 'Let's go home.' Someone said, 'Let's kill him,' then we said, 'OK, then what?' And for my money, the stories that come *after* his actual death were the real reason to do the death at all, and that includes the stuff coming up."

What's coming up is Carlin's mystery. Four super-powered beings (one in each super-title) converge on Metropolis. Each reveals that he is Superman.

"Karl Kesel has 'the kid' in *Adventures of Superman*. Karl's doing that with Tom Grummett pencilling and Doug Hazlewood inking. The cyborg, in *Superman*, is written and pencilled by Dan Jurgens and inked by Brett Breeding. We have the *Man of Steel*, the steel worker, which is written by Louise Simonson, pencilled by



Is this the real Superman? Meet John Henry Iron pounding the pages of *Superman: The Man of Steel*.

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Art Reproduction Courtesy of DC Comics

Art: Tom Grummett/Doug Hazlewood

Is this the real Superman? Meet Superman—*not* Superboy—taking on the *Adventures of Superman*.

Not the Superboy

Being mistaken for Superboy can make a hero cranky, but writer Karl Kesel wouldn't describe his teenage-looking Superman as annoyed. "He's kind of like the Rebel-Without-a-Cause Superman," he explains. "He does get annoyed when people call him Superboy because he *is* Superman. He's a clone of Superman."

Kesel certainly isn't annoyed about his part in the return of Superman and actually petitioned to get the teenage version for his run of *Adventures of Superman* beginning with #501.

"A few weeks after I took the assignment, there was a Superman summit where we figured out how to bring him back from the dead," he remembers. "I thought it would be nice if each of the Supermen somehow reflected the titles of their books. I remembered that the tagline from the old *Superboy* comic was 'the adventures of Superman when he was a boy' and I thought Superboy should be the character in *Adventures*.

"I thought no one would go for it, but at the summit, we had a huge list of all the possible ways Superman could come back and Superboy was one of them. I really stumped to get it. I'm really happy that [penciller] Tom Grummett and I ended up with this Superman because he's a really fun character."

As revealed in *Adventures* #500, the teenage clone comes from the Cadmus Project, although he was supposed to have reached full maturity. "He shouldn't be loose, but he is. He has normal teenage attitudes. He thinks he's indestructible, partly because he is, and he thinks he knows how to do everything. Most times, he's right, but a few times, he's tragically wrong."

The creative team is assuming that Superman's innate goodness and ethical stands were ingrained in his cellular structure and copied into the clone. However, access to the original's mind was impossible and the clone has *none* of Kal-El's personal recollections. Thus, encounters with old friends will have a strange twist. "I just finished a sequence where he specifically asks Lois Lane why she's not covering his stories anymore," Kesel reveals. "He's basically wondering why he isn't getting better press—he wants page one headlines. He does a few things which are pretty disquieting to her.

"Lois, Jimmy, Perry and the *Daily Planet* are all very good characters, but my Superman really has little to do with them after the first issue because he moves on to a totally different world. He associates himself with a TV station because television is the method of communication for the '90s. There will be a very fine line between PR and news in his mind."

Kesel also says his hero won't have a secret identity because he revels in being Superman. As for the other three entities claiming to be Superman, his character thinks "they're all poseurs. He just discounts them."

Although Kesel knows the final resolution to the "Reign of the Supermen," he'll only offer a hint at the answer. "All I'll say is that every single one of these four Supermen think they're Superman or at least say they are," he states. "It's a really exciting,

big, full story that's going to take a while to play out. We're going to keep people on their toes guessing. There's really close planning and we've got a chart for the next six months. It's very specific about what must take place in each issue for everything to happen like clockwork."

While there's very tight continuity between the four titles, Kesel feels people can read his book by itself. "Each of my issues so far are fairly self-contained, with beginnings, middles and endings," he says. "If you read all four titles, you get a much richer texture and it's more satisfying, but you could just read *Adventures* and have a good time. One of the things [editor] Mike Carlin insisted was that every major event that happens to any character happens in the book that deals with that character."

Kesel is mostly known for inking such projects as John Byrne's *Superman* and the *Hawk and Dove* mini-series, but he has always had an interest in writing. "When I was inking *Superman* over John, I would keep throwing ideas at him and a few of mine showed up during his run. I co-wrote the *Hawk and Dove* regular and mini-series with my wife, Barbara. Also, I have this Indiana Jones mini-series I'm doing all by myself for Dark Horse, probably out in another year. And I did some small stories with the Guardian and the Newsboy Legion during Jerry Ordway's run on *Superman*. Little by little, I've been getting my feet more into that pond."

In fact, he's pleased to be following in Ordway's footsteps on *Adventures of Superman* because "Jerry and I have always been pals and we have similar interests. When he needed a little bit of a break, he would say, 'Have Karl do some Guardian stories.' Also, Jerry started off some really cool stuff and much of it is probably going to be played up, maybe not exactly like he would have, but pretty similar."

There's no doubt that Karl Kesel is pleased to be part of the Superman saga. "Tom Grummett and I are really excited about this teenage Superman, and hope the response is phenomenal. He's the kind of character I enjoy and I think the fans will like him, too. So far, I've enjoyed doing every page. I've already got ideas I would love to do six months down the road. Because of the continuity between the four books, it depends on what the others think, but I have ideas that could keep *Adventures of Superman* going for a couple of years. People should read it because it's going to be a hell of a lot of fun. What more do you want from a comic book?"

—Craig W. Chrissinger

Jon Bogdanove and inked by Dennis Janke. And the last one is the Kryptonian, written by Roger Stern, pencilled by Jackson Guice and inked by Denis Rodier, in *Action*.

"It's all brought to you by the same guys who brought you the death of Superman, except Karl [see sidebar] who's taking over for Jerry Ordway, who decided to leave us on a peak, which is good [for him]. I don't think Jerry is gone from Superman forever, I hope not. He has done it for six years and in this business, that's a run you can't beat these days, and I thank him for it, for great years of service and a lot of fun, and now I just hope we can put out comics that he likes."

Background on each Superman remains sketchy at presstime, but what Carlin does reveal is intriguing. "The steel worker, John Henry Iron, is a man who was working on a construction site when Superman was fighting Doomsday. The building collapsed due to the fight, and he has been buried under the rubble for an undisclosed amount of time. When he comes out of it, he's obsessed with taking care of Doomsday. He has been inspired by Superman." That inspiration may not just be in honor of Superman, Carlin explains. "John Henry *may* be possessed by Superman. He literally has the spirit of Superman in him... *Maybe.*"

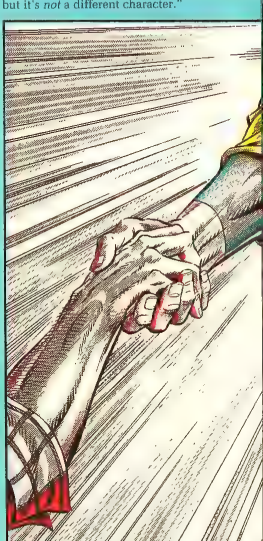
Superman is known as the last surviving son of Krypton, so in explaining the Kryptonian present on Earth, Carlin says, "Well, Superman himself is Kryptonian, so that *may be* Superman back from the dead and saying, 'I'm living in the Fortress of Solitude.'"

And that cyborg?

"It's Superman with bits and pieces added on."

The "kid" has been called "a pissed-off teenage Superman" by some, but the editor isn't one of them. "It's not just the Comics Code," he states in reference to the "pissed-off" term. "I wouldn't do that to the Superman characters. We do take what Superman stands for seriously. On one hand, we obviously don't want to be Mickey Mouse, squeaky clean; at the same time, I don't want kids getting the wrong impression of Superman. I want them to be inspired, like John Henry Iron, to do good deeds. Superman stands for many things that dirty words don't." Like, for instance, truth, justice and the American way. "These are not bad things," Carlin declares. "They've fallen out of favor. And in a way, that's another thing that Superman must fight to overcome in the eyes of the public, the readers. That's the problem; the popular characters are murderers. And Superman is somebody who will do everything else first before resorting to that.

"We do take it seriously. There were many Superman comics before us, there will be many Superman comics after us, and I personally think that what I liked about Superman when I was a kid is still in the comic. The stories we tell are more sophisticated, a little more in-depth, more up to date, but it's *not* a different character."



To Mike Carlin, Superman's death wasn't an end, but a beginning of interesting stories about people.

He laughs a bit, excusing his tangent, as he gets back to the jacket-clad, earring-wearing Superman. "He says he's Superman, everyone calls him Superboy and he's annoyed. Where does he come from? Well, we've been hinting in the stories about many places where all of these guys could have come from. It's pretty safe to say that this guy looks like he's an unfinished clone of Superman. He broke out before he was done, so he also *may* literally be Superman.

Art: Dan Jurgens/Brett Breeding

Is this the real Superman? Meet the Cyborg Superman gliding through *Superman*.

"Those are the four guys, they all come to Metropolis at the end of *Adventures* #500 that's the big one—and they claim to be Superman. They're all Superman. They all start out separately; they all come from different places, they all have different stories; they all *might* be Superman, they all *might not* be Superman; they all may have pieces of Superman. It's a mystery, and that's one of the reasons why we've been trying to keep it a little more secret than even the death. I mean, the death, to me, was *not* the end of the story. It was the beginning.

"So, when people said, 'The death of Superman,' I didn't feel like we were blowing the story's end. Now, for us to say which one, *if any*, is the real Superman, why would you bother to read the stories? Those guys put a great deal of work into these things and they

would like people to read them. Even if you read it and judge it poorly and say this is not a great job, it would be nice if they tried it rather than decide from a newspaper article, or even a COMICS SCENE article.

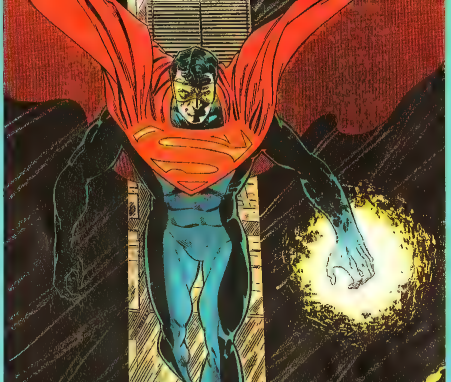
"The fun of this is the rollercoaster ride. Basically, since it was announced that Superman was going to die, everybody said he'll be back. The twists and turns are the fun, getting off the rollercoaster. You all expect to get off the rollercoaster when you get on it. We would like you to get off and *want* to get back on.

"Hopefully, you'll think that all of them could be Superman, and as the story unfolds, you'll find clues and pointers telling you otherwise or definitely. I'm hoping people will argue over which one is Superman."

Reactions to the death of Superman from readers, fans and mainstream media caught Carlin and DC Comics off guard. "We weren't prepared," he admits. "I personally wasn't prepared. I literally spent days just doing interviews. DC wasn't prepared for how big it got. We answered the problems that arose with quick second and third printings. Many people criticized DC for not anticipating how many people would order the comics. The reality of the situation is we print to order for comic stores. If they had ordered more, we would have printed more. The fact of the matter is, we *did* overprint by a lot. It still wasn't enough. There's no way, if people order two million copies of a comic, that we're going to overprint by another two million and guess the right number. When it comes down to the media and the help or damage they can do, there's no way to bank on it, or even guarantee it."

Readers are taking second place only to Lois Lane, who "has quite a good reaction to the whole scenario," says Carlin. "This is not just a superhero who died, this is her fiancée. She's looking closer and harder at these guys and finding some possibilities that maybe they are Superman. She's going to have the toughest job of them all, and at the same time she's horrified, it's a shocking thing. They will have just pronounced Clark Kent dead because he has been missing for so long. And that's going to be a problem for her. She's going to be torn because, it's like, 'This is scary.' The problem is, 'I should be happy. This one has elements of Clark, this one, elements of Superman, this one has elements of his Kryptonian background. They could *all* be him.' "

But, while Ma and Pa Kent "freak out," according to Carlin, "the world is going to be sitting around picking their favorites. It's going to be like a contest.



Art: Lee Loeb/Gulacy/Dennis Rodier

Is this the real Superman? Meet the Last Son of Krypton fighting his way through *Action Comics*.

In particular [in the DC Universe], Guy Gardner chooses his favorite right away. He likes the one that kills people," laughs Carlin. "He likes the one that doesn't take any guff. And that's probably the Kryptonian—maybe not."

Superman's future contains more than just "these four guys. There's also a TV show [*Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*] on next year. Now, I don't know a lot about it. They're casting right now. We've known about it for a long time and been building this storyline to work hand-in-hand with the TV show. It's not going to be, literally, the adventures of Superman where he is now in the comic books, but we want to definitely be similar to what they're doing. Hopefully, we're not going to be totally changing gears, which so far seems so good. We're excited about it; this could really be fun.

"It comes from our current take on the Metropolis characters," Carlin continues. "It's definitely more *Daily Planet*, kind of a *Hill Street Blues* ensemble. They're all going to be part of it. And Lex Luthor, the way he is in the comics, not totally the way he is now. (I don't know if he's going to be bald. Depending on the actor they hire, I guess.) He's the father of the Luthor we have now. What we're hoping is that they'll eventually tell the same kinds of stories we do."

I hope people have fun with it,' Carlin enthuses. "We're not trying to piss off anybody, we're not looking to aggravate anybody. We didn't kill Superman just to kill him, we killed him to tell some stories. That's totally where all this was generated, and we think we have a good story. In a way, the odds are in our favor with four shots at pleasing people. Pick your favorites, have fun with them.

"We're trying to tell stories about people: People get engaged and they die. If you paint Superman as something other than a person, nobody's going to care about him. As far as these things being big-deal events, I'm of two minds: Either DC the company would never let people do this—which I think is possible in the past—or nobody ever

A near-death experience brings Pa Kent together with his son, for what may not be the last time.

asked, because many people say, 'Oh, they'll never let you kill Superman' or, 'Oh, they'll never let you change his costume' or, 'Oh, they'll never let you let him get married.' And all we do is ask and they say sure, because we're in the business to tell *interesting* stories.

"If it's interesting that he gets engaged, good or bad, for better or for worse, it's our duty to try to do interesting stories. Many people were mad at us for killing Superman: it's not that we don't care that they're mad but *if* they really cared about Superman, they would have been buying his comics all along. We need to do things to draw people's attention to the books, and if they look at the books and then don't like them, that's cool. But if people just decide because they once saw a *SuperFriends* cartoon when they were a kid and Superman was corny, that's *not* what we're about."

The seven-part "Funeral for a Friend" storyline is a good example of what Carlin & company are trying to do with their titles. "I thought it had every possible approach to finding out what losing a loved one is about. It also showed what losing somebody important to the world is about, and that was what interested us and that was the whole reason to do the story. We did think it would increase our sales but nobody imagined we would increase them as much as we did.

"Maybe not everybody who bought *Superman* #75 is going to stick with it and read it forever, but I bet you, we have many more regular readers now, because people will like what they've seen. They do get hooked on its soap opera aspect and we will have done a good job on Superman. And that's all any of us ever hoped for. I don't think of any of us as the guys who killed Superman; we're the guys who are telling interesting stories involving Superman. For a while, we were the most hated people in the world, and now we'll bring him back and people will hate us for doing that. So, you can't win."

"People die," explains Carlin. But in comics, they can come back.

Art: Dan Jurgens/Brett Breeding

Still cryptic, Carlin explains the length of the "Reign." "We have a year's worth of stories that extend from this major event. This story could end in April or it could go six months to a year. I mean, that's the soap opera. It's pretty safe to say, when you stop seeing the words 'Reign of the Supermen,' that the storyline's over.

"This turned out to be a good thing for all of us. It brought new customers into the comics stores. It was Superman, finally, the comic books getting some attention—*not* a TV show, *not* a movie—the place where it all started finally getting the focus and that was a great thing. It's good for me, but it's also good for the guys who slave over the books, because they get a royalty based on sales.

"I don't know how the people around the office feel, but I think I'm Superman's savior," Mike Carlin laughs. "Actually, that's not what my honest feelings are. I mean, it's not me, it's the team. We have our meetings and everybody has their say. It does funnel through me, and it does have to be approved by other people at the same time. You don't have four titles a month if you're a floundering character; Superman is doing OK. Our goals are always to increase what we've got. You always want to make more money for the guys, for us. Superman *should* be on top. it *shouldn't* be the X-Men forever."

NIGHTS OF THE MAN-BAT

Jamie Delano promises big changes for that reluctant hero on the wing.

By JOE NAZZARO

Although Man-Bat has been part of the DC Universe for more than two decades, his appearances have been as elusive as those of his nocturnal namesake. Since his debut in *Detective Comics* in 1970, the leathery winged anti-hero has flown through the Batman titles on several occasions, even starring in his own short-lived series at one point. In recent years, however, Man-Bat has disappeared into virtual obscurity, prompting many fans to wonder if he had followed numerous other DC characters into comics limbo.

All that may change in the near future. Man-Bat was the featured villain in "On Leather Wings," the pilot episode of *Batman: The Animated Series*; soon, he'll be starring in his own three-issue limited series, written by Jamie Delano and painted by John Bolton. For Delano, whose name is normally associated with more adult fare such as *Hellblazer* and *World Without End*, *Man-Bat* was an opportunity to return—albeit briefly—to the comics mainstream.

DC editor Art Young basically phoned me up one day and said, 'Jamie, I've got permission to use Man-Bat,' and I said, 'Who?' Not having an immense, comprehensive background in comics, I had never actually encountered Man-Bat before, Art said. He's this Batman alter-ego, a genetic accident who's half-man/half-bat. The thing is, you can write a horror story featuring the character."

"He sent me what little Man-Bat material was already extant; about two or three comics. He also said, 'If I can get John Bolton to paint it, would you be interested?' I thought for about five seconds and said, 'Yeah, probably.' I then asked, 'Does that mean Batman has to be in the story?' and Art said, 'No, not if you don't want him to be.' Call it some sort of inverted snobbery if you like, but I didn't want to write it just for the sake of writing Batman."

"Initially, we were all set to design a story that didn't feature Batman at all," the writer confesses. "Then, John (Bolton) started to think he wouldn't be likely to get another chance to paint the character, and John had some ideas of how to portray him, so I gradually revised my ideas and found a role for Batman in the story."

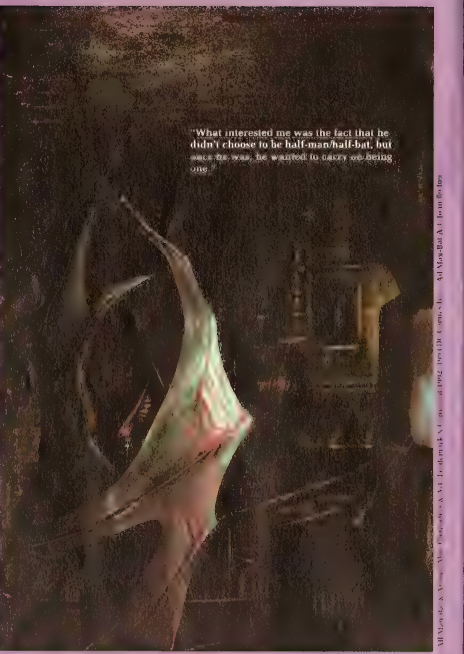
Although Delano is reluctant to divulge too much of his storyline, he provides a quick teaser of things to come: "The stock plotline concerns a group of eco-activists who, in a publicity-seeking raid, break into a genetic research plant. Basically, they get hold of some mutant insects—giant locusts—that have been developed as a starvation weapon for use in potential future conflicts.

"The raid goes wrong, and the story's heroine, a young lady named Marilyn Munro (spelled different, as she points out throughout the story) winds up with this sample of genetically-altered locust, and things then get out of hand. She finds herself with Man-Bat and Francine, or 'Mrs. Man-Bat,' as I prefer to call her. They've undergone some evolutionary changes since they last appeared in DC comics, and are now living in an underground cave system in the southwest deserts of the U.S. Marilyn spends some time with them, but I'm not going to tell you any more about the plot!"

One aspect that attracted Delano to the project was the chance to develop Man-Bat's unrealized potential. "What interested me about the character," he explains, "was the fact that he initially didn't choose to be half-man/half-bat, but once he was, he wanted to carry on being one. It appeared to fit him somehow, and Batman was the oppressor, if you like, the limiter of choice in those situations, because he kept knocking poor old Kirk Langstrom out, administering the antidote against his will, and turning him back.

"I hypothesized that OK, the way it wound up in the last story we saw featuring the characters, Kirk and Francine were going off to live happily ever after as human beings again. I thought, 'What if he didn't keep taking the antidote, and the mutation re-occurs?' If Kirk really desires this to be the case, what's so great about being human if you can be a bat?

Peter Sheehy/J. Wells



All Man-Bat & Arrow: Who Controls Art Technique? © & ™ 1992 DC Comics. All Man-Bat & Arrow Rights Reserved.

"The human species is in such a powerless condition, that a super-evolutionary jump of some sort might be what's called for, so in the intervening time, Kirk and Francine have gone off and raised some genetically-engineered offspring. Kirk's trying to create this new hybrid species that will be able to populate the Earth as humanity becomes extinct. When the mutated locusts fall into his hands, he has the moral choice of whether to suppress them or allow humanity's foolishness in creating them to bring about their destruction."

Delano adds that having Langstrom release the insects into the world "would leave the playing field clear for his species to become dominant. Batman, of course, is in complete opposition to that occurring, so you get a nice interplay between the two characters, and then the hybrid children come into play, because they're half and half. It gave me a theme for a stock action-adventure plot: we've got giant bats living in an underground cave system, we have people zipping around on hang gliders, Batman getting dressed up and going down into the caves, all that sort of stuff. At the same time, there's an underlying moral theme to be addressed, that I could actually get some pleasure out of addressing."

"Much as I enjoyed writing [*Hellblazer*] and put a lot into it," says writer Jamie Delano, "I was getting sick of the sound of my own voice."

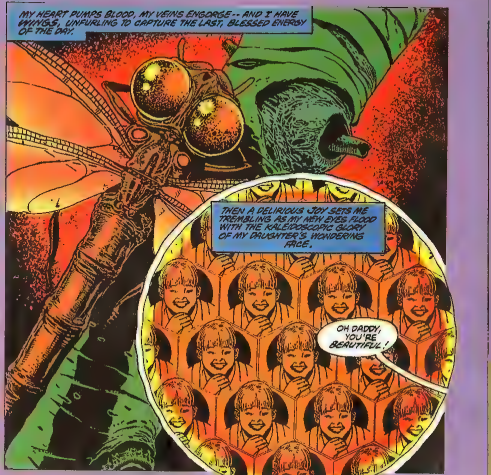
The writer is happy to note that DC gave him a free hand to do what he wanted in *Man-Bat*, which came as somewhat of a surprise to him, considering the supporting cast included a certain Dark Knight Detective. "I got

initial approval on the synopsis without any trouble whatsoever," he relates, "and then, at a later date, somebody reread it and thought, 'Wait a minute. He's going to change Man-Bat's physical appearance permanently!' because Man-Bat ends up with an 80-foot wingspan, and shit like that.

"There were a few collywobbles, to use an English-ism, at that suggestion, but they decided, 'No, it's fair play. We said go ahead in the first place, so we're not going to complain about it now.' No, there were no problems. That was one of my major reservations about including Batman in the first place, I thought, 'There's going to be so much commercial paranoia surrounding his use that I really don't want to know,' but as it transpired, there were no problems."

As for the Dark Knight, Delano hasn't gone "completely over the top, where Batman does something massively out of character, although he has a slightly ambiguous role in the story that may not be usual for him. You may not always be on Batman's side by any stretch of the imagination. He's a force in his own right, and representative of certain energies and power systems, but he's not entirely sympathetic. He represents the justice system, if you like, which is not incorruptible. With the letter of the law, there's no moral grey area for Batman, yet the whole story deals with grey areas, so he's out on a limb quite a lot of the time.

"You have Man-Bat representing the revolutionary force that wants to overturn the human order, and replace it with his man/bat hybrids. You've also got Marilyn Munro, the young, female eco-activist who's emotionally split. She's sympathetic to Man-Bat's goals, but she's human and doesn't want to see the destruction of her species."


MY HEART PUMPS BLOOD. MY VEINS ENGORGE -- AND I HAVE WINGS. UNFURLING TO CAPTURE THE LAST, BLESSED ENERGY OF THE DAY.
THEN A DELIRIOUS JOY SETS ME TREMBLING AS MY MEN DIES FLOOD WITH THE KALEIDOSCOPIC GLORY OF MY DAUGHTER'S WONDERING FACE.
OH DADDY, YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL!

With no plans to write another *Man-Bat* series, the writer is content with *Animal Man* and won't mind when his run is over.

Regarding the obvious similarity in names between his female lead character and a certain legendary film starlet, Delano claims it simply seemed like a good idea at the time. "I could have called her any name, but I wanted something that would catch the ear a little bit because of the connotations, and that also gave me a few new aspects of her character. She comes from LA, and was brought up in a movie family from the technical side. Her father was a film cameraman, so it just gave me a little bit of something to start with. One of her catchphrases all the way through is, 'But it's spelled differently,' because everyone always comments on the name. It was just a hook."

THESE OTHER LIFE-FORMS, WHICH I PUSH BY AND THROUGH, DON'T SEEM DISTRESSED AS THEY WEND THEIR INEVITABLE WAY DOWN TO AVIAN WILLING DRAUGHTS OF OBLIVION.
THEY'VE ACCEPTED THEIR FATES.
NOT ME, THOUGH. I'M BUDDY BAKER -- AND I'M NOT DEAD YET.

"I was faced with tying up several loose plotlines," Delano says of *Animal Man*.

For Delano, who wanted a change of pace after writing the deeply introspective *Hellblazer* for four years, the straightforward storyline of *Man-Bat* was just what he needed. "When I actually sat down to write it, I was surprised at how easily it flowed. My experience with writing *Hellblazer* had been that you sweat an awful lot and stay up late, especially writing a human, rather than a fantastic character. The trouble with writing a character like John Constantine for four years is that you become obsessed. You live with him day in and day out, and the last thing you think about before going to bed is John Constantine.

"Much as I enjoyed writing that book and put a lot into it, I was getting sick of the sound of my own voice, and it was nice to do something completely

different and self-contained. With *Man-Bat*, I had it plotted completely from start to finish before I had written one word, and it was like slotting the bricks into place."

The writer also adjusted his style of scripting on the mini-series, providing a loosely-structured script that allowed for a greater contribution from artist John Bolton. "John agreed to do the story once he read the synopsis," Delano recalls, "and he had a few ideas about environments that he wanted to draw. I said, 'The best way to do this is for me to write a first-draft script with very limited artistic direction: just general outlines of locations, scene progressions and emotional dramas that I want to bring out in the scenes. You have a look at it, tell me if I've given you enough space, or whether there's any change you want to make, and then I'll take it back and turn it into a full script.'

"It's still in the first script stage, because John wants to go from the first draft and says that's fine. He has done thumbnail breakdowns for the whole thing, and figured out where it all fits in before he sits down and starts painting it. I've worked in different ways with different artists, and John seems happy that he has the dialogue there, but that too is completely flexible when he completes the artwork. If something's out of step, there's no trouble rephrasing it. I have no objection to doing that, and I think that will achieve a great result from John."

"Initially, we were all set to design a story that didn't feature Batman," Delano explains. "John Bolton had some ideas of how to portray him, so I revised my ideas."

IF I HAD A VOICE I'D SCREAM AS I FALL, SPINNING DOWN THE SICKENING HELTER-SKELTER OF THE AMO-BARIA'S P.A.N.H., HORSEMAN, WITH THE JOYOUS TERROR OF THE RIDE.

The writer indicates that the stage has been set for a second *Man-Bat* series, but it's unlikely that he'll be a part of it. "There's lots of potential, and some good new characters that I've created, which would certainly provide material for many serials or series, but whether I'll want to do them or not, I don't know. I may be quite content to make a gift of them to DC and let somebody else do it. I've probably said all I want to say about Man-Bat. Who knows, if suddenly I had no other work, *Man-Bat* was a runaway success and everybody was screaming at me, then yeah, I would never write anything off as a possibility, but I have no plans in that direction at the moment."

With his work on *Man-Bat* finished, Delano has turned his attention to other projects, including *Animal Man*, which he began writing with issue #51. The recent storyline, "Flesh and Blood," is his attempt to re-define the character, while tidying up some of the book's inconsistencies.

Writing along the evolutionary track, Delano pulled Animal Man from death through all phases of life.

"I was faced with the task of tying up several loose plotlines, as well as taking my interpretation of the character, and what he can and can't do, all of which has been quite hazy to date," he says. "Animal Man has this capability to utilize the powers of animals, but that bothered me a little, because animals don't have powers, they have physical capabilities. I had to come up with some abstract rationale for all of this.

"I've got various ideas for directions in which I can take Animal Man; what he could do that might be socially useful. The primary concern of all of us alive on this planet should be our survival, and I think Animal Man, along with Black Orchid and Swamp Thing, is one of the DC elemental characters that could best be pressed into service.

"It has also been suggested that there may be a crossover annual at some stage between the various elemental characters," he continues. "It sounds so trite these days saying 'strong eco-content,' but there are ways and means of approaching it. There are far too many 'green themes' which generally turn people off, rather than scaring the shit out of them, which is what we *should* be doing."

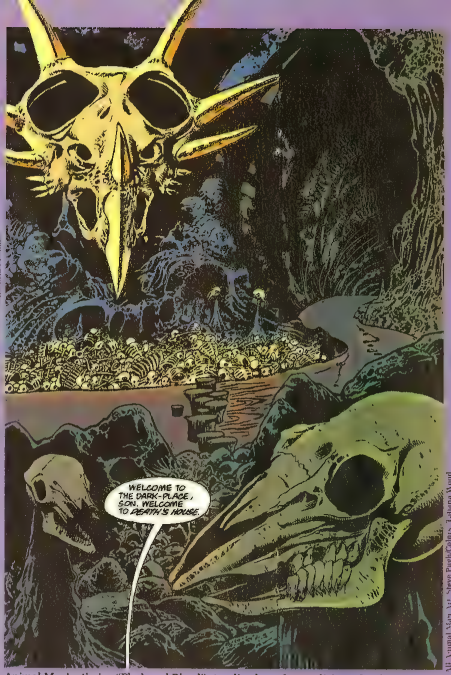
"I think *Animal Man*, along with Black Orchid and Swamp Thing, is one of the DC elementals," notes Delano.

Delano is unsure of how his work on *Animal Man* will lead into that of Grant Morrison (CS #28), who's also slated for a six-issue run, but he doesn't have a problem with another writer coming in. "As far as I'm aware, I'm supposed to be the regular *Animal Man* writer until I quit. The first storyline ran seven issues, and I've done another three, which makes 10. I'm contracted to do 14 or 15 issues, but having said that, I have absolutely no objection if they want to run six Grant Morrison stories in there. It won't cause me to lose any sleep."

After *Animal Man*, Delano plans to start working on another book, originally intended for Disney's Touchmark imprint. "It's called *Ghostdancing*, and has now gone to DC with Art Young," he relates. "It's a contemporary, psychedelic, apocalyptic Western Indian story, but I'm a little put off by...well no, I shall still enjoy writing it, but it was first conceived before *Dances With Wolves* had come out, and now there's something like 50 films about Indians in production, so when it comes out, it's just going to be another Indian book."

"*Ghostdancing* isn't a straight, native American, back-to-nature story. It deals with designer drugs, the San Andreas Fault, phenomenology and 1960s culture, so there are many big themes condensed into a six-part mini-series with mythological Indian and white American characters."

One of Delano's recent projects that went virtually unnoticed is *Nightraven*, a graphic novel he created with David (*V For Vendetta*) Lloyd. "It was basically a 1920s U.S. gangster story, which I enjoyed writing and was very pleased with the results. Unfortunately, its publication coincided with Marvel UK's management resigning *en masse* and being replaced by a completely new team, and the book got diced in the middle of it. They printed about 6,000 copies, and while there's talk of reprinting it, that was the subject of some agitation to me. I don't expect massive publicity or support, but when I spent time working on a book with a good result, I thought it was a little short-sighted of them."



All Animal Man art: Steve Pugh/Colors: Tatjana Wood

Animal Man's stirring "Flesh and Blood" storyline brought new light to the character and his supporting cast.

With so many irons in the fire, Delano isn't quite sure what will be appearing next, or for that matter, what he'll be doing in the coming months. "*Animal Man* is current," he says, ticking off his current projects. "*Man-Bat* is somewhere in the future. *Ghost Dancing* should come out before that. If it doesn't, I shall be hopping up and down somewhere, slightly annoyed. I want to do a graphic novel/political thriller that has to do with the upsurge of neo-nazism in Europe, but I don't know when I'm going to have time. I should get that under way before the bastards take over, because then I *won't* be able to write it."

For the moment, Jamie Delano is happy to do whatever projects take his fancy, without being tied down for too long. "I've had four years of ongoing stories with *Hellblazer*, and OK, I've taken on *Animal Man*, but that certainly won't run more than 15 or 20 issues; I don't think I could sustain my interest for that long. If a company said, 'Would you like to do a six-part series with this character?' and I could think of an idea that the character's sensibilities suggested to me, I might as well say yes, but that's as far as I would want to go, just play with it for a little bit."

Pal of the Zombies

Photo: Michael Pare

Photo: Lisa Ortiz

Terry Black writes Western paperbacks and movie scripts, but he really digs penning *Tales from the Crypt*.

Dig that crazy Terry Black! He's scripting "Tales from the Crypt."

By PAT JANKIEWICZ

Entering screenwriter Terry Black's condo is a shock: The place is filled with cool kitsch, offbeat art (a black velvet painting of Snoopy) and a giant TV surrounded by videotapes stacked to the ceiling, as well as interesting toys and knick-knacks. He may be the only man in Hollywood who conducts business on a Kermit the Frog telephone.

Black, a big, affable fellow, works several jobs. He writes for HBO's *Tales from the Crypt* (he won an ACE award for his first episode, "Dig That Cat...He's Real Gone"), teaches college and writes pulp Western novels. He also scripted *Dead Heat*.

Considering his material, it's only natural that he hails from Pittsburgh, home of *Living Dead* filmmaker George Romero. Before screenwriting, Black toiled as a computer programmer ("It's fun, but it wasn't what I was born to do—everyone with that job would really rather be doing something else!").

Black is also the older brother of screenwriter Shane Black, a fact he treats with self-deprecating humor. He points to a wall-sized blow-up of a lurid magazine cover depicting a scantily clad woman. "This is the cover of my first sale, to *Nightshade Mystery Magazine*. I was paid $25 for a story in 1980. In comparison, I'm fond of mentioning my brother Shane, who wrote *Lethal Weapon*. His first sale was that script, for which he got a quarter of a million advance. His first sale was precisely 10,000 times mine!"

His brother's success inspired Black to escape computers and write his zombie cop thriller, *Dead Heat*. "When Shane sold *Lethal Weapon*, it was a kick in the pants for me," he admits. "I thought, 'I could do that!' The plot is basically *D.O.A.* In *D.O.A.*, Edmund O'Brien ingests a slow-acting poison and has 48 hours to find his killer. I thought, 'Wouldn't it be funny to go that one better, so that he's already dead and decomposing?' "

Black went on to write for *Tales from the Crypt*, the HBO series based on the classic EC comics (CS #8). "It came about because of Shane," he smiles. "All roads lead to Shane! Joel Silver wanted Shane to write an episode and Shane wouldn't, because it's beneath him to adapt comic-book stories for cable TV. It's not snobbery, Shane's just fixated on big-budget features. They asked him who could do it and my name came to mind. Joel knew about the *Dead Heat* script, which was the perfect sensibility for *Tales*."

He chose his first episode in an offbeat way. "They gave me 50 mimeographed copies of all the original *Crypt* comics, and said, 'Pick your favorite.' They were all pretty gruesome; you would be reading when a guy would get his guts ripped out and say, 'No, I don't think so!' I came to 'Dig That Cat,' and it was obvious, as soon as I

started reading, that it was perfect. I love that kind of off-center satire. The really serious *Crypt* stories didn't appeal to me. The whole idea of 'Cat' is that people are coming to cheer as he dies. It's very festive.

"Ulric the Undying has nine lives because he has a piece of cat brain sewn into his cranium. Very plausible, I thought," Black chuckles. "He takes longer to resurrect after each death. I loved the story and wanted to maintain that tone. I also wanted to have dimensions beyond the comic, so the characters explore the implications of what they're doing. The mad scientist, Dr. Emil Manfred, makes a speech I'm quite fond of. He says, 'You kill a man by destroying one percent of his body. You can be 99 percent healthy and dead,' which was something I got from a high school biology book."

The writer enjoyed collaborating with his director. "Richard Donner is a man of strong opinion. I liked working with him because he has a great visual imagination. The show was filmed in a very expressionistic style; he shot it like a carnival, full of lights, colors and sounds.

"They were tight for time, because the guy had to die nine times and they didn't have time to waste extraneous footage. Donner had come up with a way," Black marvels, "to take out one scene, a press conference, take the one bit of salient dialogue and embed it in the following scene."

Black enjoys his ventures into the *Crypt*. "It isn't difficult doing a comic, but some are trickier than others—the hardest to adapt are the simplest stories. You have seven pages of comic book story and 30 minutes to fill, so you must use some invention to keep the story going. When you're doing it with real actors, you have to make it more plausible—hoary clichés that fit well into the mouth of a two-dimensional cartoon character have to be updated, not just because of the medium, but because 30 years have passed since the stories were published.

"I thought the title, 'Dig That Cat... He's Real Gone,' was really dated. It was for the beatnik era, and I wanted to call it 'Dying For Dollars,' but Joel Silver wouldn't hear of it!"

The biggest shock for Black was winning the ACE award (for cable TV excellence) for "Dig That Cat." "It was amazing. When I was nominated, it was no big deal, I figured, 'Obviously, I'm *not* going to win, and it was annoying that I had to rent a tuxedo. I felt compelled that as long as I had any chance of winning—however remote—I must go.

"I didn't write a speech. Why bother? I wasn't going to win. Lea Thompson announced I won, so I thought, 'Shit! Now what? I'll say something snide about my brother, that always works!' They handed me the award and I said, 'I would like to thank my snot-nosed kid brother Shane for giving me the kick in the pants to start my writing career.' I held it up and said, 'This will show the little bastard I can do it too!' The awards were simulcast on 12 cable stations, including the Christian Broadcasting Network!"

He still marvels at his victory. "I was up against all these respectable projects: Ray Bradbury, the pre-eminent writer of fantasy in this nation, a special about Vietnam, an adaptation of *The Turn of the Screw*, and here I am with a story adapted from a comic book that was banned in the '50s for corrupting young people!"

The writer also had a prank ready. "Ray Bradbury wasn't there, but I wanted to pat him on the shoulder and say, 'Sorry, Ray, maybe next time!' I'm a great fan of his," Black states. "I cut my teeth on *The Martian Chronicles* and *The Illustrated Man*. I wrote him and said even though I had actually won the award, I felt he deserved recognition for being an inspiration. He wrote an extremely nice letter back saying he appreciated being considered a collaborator."

Photo: Michael Parra

***Creature Feature*, Black's unproduced movie script about a cartoonist whose monstrous creations come to life, became the basis for "Korman's Kalamity."**

"The whole idea of 'Cat' is that people are coming to cheer as he dies," Black notes. "It's very festive."

All Crypt Photos: Copyright 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993 HBO

Due to his sick sense of humor, "I'm often called upon to write the Crypt Keeper sequences [that frame] episodes," he reveals. "When they wanted a bad pun, they would call me. They liked my Crypt Keeper stuff in 'Cat,' so I kept getting calls at odd hours saying, 'We need a bad pun in 40 minutes, can you think of something?' It was a pretty sweet deal because I was paid $1,000 a pun."

The writer's atrocious puns brought him face to face with the Terminator. "They asked me to meet with Arnold Schwarzenegger, because he wanted to appear with the Crypt Keeper. He says [in perfect imitation], 'I vant jokes about bodybuilding and death!'

"He was actually intimidating," Black notes in mock horror. "He gave me 30 minutes to come up with something, and before he left, he said, 'I'll be back!' I said, 'My God, what can I do?' Another guy came up with the Crypt Keeper lifting human bones as barbells. My gag was the Crypt Keeper going up to a dead body with two embalming needles. He says, 'We want to pump—Thunk! Thunk! [stabs them into body]—you up!' "

Another Cryptic tale mutated in a strange way. "I wrote a film script called *Creature Feature*, about a cartoonist who draws monsters that come to life. Bill Teitler, the *Crypt* producer, loved *Creature Feature*, but couldn't set it up anywhere. He said, 'Why don't we take the idea, use the best scenes and condense it into a *Crypt* episode?' which we did.

"The requirement is that all *Crypt* episodes must be adaptations of the comic stories. Fortunately, there was one called 'Kamen's Kalamity,' written and drawn by EC Comics artist Jack Kamen. It tells how he came to work for EC, and introduces the bullpen. The story was completely lame, with no point to it at all, so we said, 'OK, that's the one we're adapting! We'll have to make up new material to make it more interesting,' and that's how we made wholesale rip-offs from my *Creature Feature* script. It was one of the finest episodes."

And what did Jack Kamen think of it? "He asked us to change the name!" Black laughs. "Being fair to him, one of the things we introduced was a nagging wife who bitches about his impotence! That was our invention, so I can see how he wouldn't want that.

"They also gave 'Korman's Kalamity' [the new name] to William Gaines [the late EC founder] because he was a character in the story. Gaines too, wanted his name changed. We called him 'Bob Grimes.' One change he insisted on was when 'Grimes' says to the artist, 'Let's get a move on—we've got a sleazy magazine to put out! He objected to the term sleazy. 'My magazines weren't sleazy!' " Black smiles. "You could have fooled me!"

Before his success helping out at the Crypt, Black tried his hand at adapting a Marvel monster. "*The Lizard* was a film I wanted to write. I was looking through Marvel titles, and saw all the really good heroes were taken. There was a *Spider-Man*

In *Dead Heat*, Black's variation on *D.O.A.*, Treat Williams goes after his killers.

Dead Heat Photo: Copyright 1988 New World Pictures

As Black's "Reluctant Vampire," Malcolm McDowell savored liquids on deposit with blood bank owner George Wendt.

Black keeps the Crypt-Keeper in quips. He even pumped out a few puns when *Crypt* episode director Arnold Schwarzenegger came to visit.

Photo: Michael Parra

Photo: Debbie Edelstein

TV series, and a *Captain America* film. What they hadn't done justice to were Marvel's villains who often rival the heroes with how quirky, odd and fascinating they are.

"The Lizard was *always* my favorite because of the questions he raises. Here's a respectable doctor [Dr. Curt Connors] who loses his arm, and creates a formula that grows it back, using the same regenerative power that causes lizards' tails to reform. Only, as an unfortunate side effect, it turns him into a reptilian horror with a cobbled green face and smoldering red eyes.

"It could address the whole question of recombinant engineering," he declares. "It could look at what we're doing to ourselves and what the nature of being human is. When do you stop being homo sapiens? That could have been a helluva movie. Spider-Man wasn't included because it would have changed the tone and would have been legally hard to arrange.

"Basically, my concept was that the Lizard has gone completely berserk, way over the edge. At one point, he gives himself a deliberate overdose [of formula] to see how far it will go, and he sprouts even more limbs—he's like a Lizard centipede with 12 arms. The lab itself would be the villain, like in *Coma*. You can take a body part, sell it off and it will regenerate.

"I've always loved the character and was very fond of Todd McFarlane's use of the Lizard in *Spider-Man* #1. For the first time, he was actually scary! At first, I wanted to kill him off, but Stan Lee objected," Black notes. "He said, 'Wait, we've got a sequel possibility here!' Unfortunately, it never went beyond that, because we couldn't get New World to back the project."

Black almost took on another comic. "Warner Bros. asked me if I wanted to rewrite the script for [a pre-TV series movie project of] *The Flash*," he reveals. "The premise was that the Flash is a born-again Christian who gets his powers while researching the Shroud of Turin. The ghostly energy of Jesus rises up from the Shroud and blesses him. Because of this divine endorsement, he finds that he can run really fast."

He laughs in disbelief. "In the story's climax, the villain is too tough, Flash can't beat him, so he turns his eyes heavenward and says, 'God, give me a hand!' A lightning bolt electrocutes the villain! It was the *dumbest* script I have ever read."

As for his own *Dead Heat*, "The script was a bit beyond the movie. My concept was he's on the ragged edge of decomposing; one arm falls off and he's hit with so many bullets that there's a hole in his chest you can see through. When Roger busts in and confronts his killer at the end, New World wanted to explain it better, so they added a scene where Vincent Price makes a long speech about the resurrection process and how it works, and it's nothing you don't already know. The story grinds to a halt!

"Price delivers that speech well—it was almost worth it to have him do it," says the writer. "What struck me was how schizophrenic he was. On camera, he's unspeakably evil, but as soon as they say 'Cut,' he's the nicest guy."

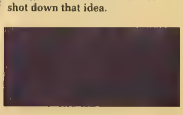
One of the worst gags in *Dead Heat* was the cop's name, Roger Mortis. "It was a gag. I thought I would eventually come up with a real name, but it grew on me. There's a guy who gets blown up. I called him 'Smitty.' Treat Williams gave him the last name 'Reens.' There was an audible groan in the office."

The studio never groaned, however. "New World wanted a scene where they find a mysterious back room in a butcher shop. I said, 'Why?' They were adamant. I thought, 'I'll put the most idiotic thing in there, and it will be so insulting they won't use it.' I had them find a zombie duck head. They pull a switch and it quacks. They *liked it* and it's in the movie!"

Photo: Sam Emerson

Art: Todd McFarlane Productions (© copyright 1991 Marvel Entertainment Group)

Black wanted to script *The Lizard* as a movie (sans Spider-Man), but New World Pictures shot down that idea.



The writer took home an ACE award for scripting "Dig That Cat...He's Real Gone."

Black has been involved with various projects. "I have an impressive list of films I *might* have written," he jokes. "Foremost among them was Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Princess of Mars*, but I got fired! I annoyed them by writing it too fast. Ricardo Mestres, head of [Disney's] Hollywood Pictures, asked if

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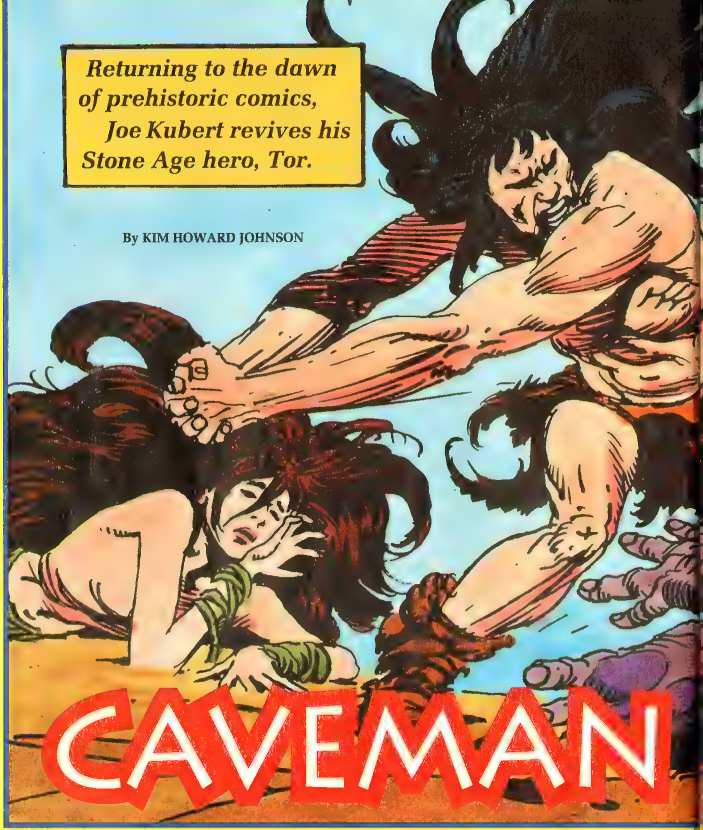


Returning to the dawn of prehistoric comics, Joe Kubert revives his Stone Age hero, Tor.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

In a land beyond time, Tor is the mightiest caveman of all! And fans who have long awaited new adventures of the Stone Age hero are being rewarded.

Legendary artist Joe Kubert has rescued his creation from comics limbo to do battle against nature, dinosaurs and his fellow man in a brand new four-issue limited series from Epic.

After working on a variety of strips for DC, Harvey, Quality, Holyoke and MLJ in the '40s, he came up with *Tor*.

"I first thought of *Tor* on board a troop ship going to Germany in 1950, when I was in the Army," Kubert explains. "I guess it was really spawned by my interest and love for Hal Foster's *Tarzan*. All I did was take him back a little further in time. I first published him in 3-D comics back in 1953, when I got out of the Army. I've always liked him and felt strongly about him."

Originally published by St. John, *Tor* was brought back by DC in 1975-76, but Kubert was too busy to create new adventures. He began planning a revival of *Tor* about seven years ago, but was sidetracked by his acclaimed *Abraham Stone* graphic novel. Kubert intended to do a series of *Tor* books, but his plans were altered by the deplorable political situation in the

All Art: ™ Trademark & ©copyright 1983 Joe Kubert© courtesy Marvel Comics

former republic of Yugoslavia.

"My original plan was to publish four or five of the *Abraham Stones*, and then come out with *Tor*. The problem was that Ervin Rustemagic, who runs Strip Art Features in Yugoslavia, has been stuck in Sarejevo with his family. He has been there for a year, and it has been absolutely impossible for him to get out, even though hundreds of people, including myself, have tried everything. The work I've done, including *Abraham Stone*, was initially going to be published through Ervin's efforts. However, I decided to go ahead with *Tor*—I originally put together material to do this about 1986—instead of continuing with *Abraham Stone* when Ervin wasn't around. In fact, I have an entire 44-page *Abraham Stone* story in the drawer, waiting for him when he gets out!"

When Kubert decided to proceed with *Tor*, he had his choice of companies ready to assist him. "Several different publishers have been very kind, and told me that if I have something like this that I want to publish, please do so. DC, Blackthorne and Tundra had expressed interest, but I got together with Carl Potts at Marvel, who's a terrific guy, and that's where it came to be published."

Kubert is especially fond of *Tor* because the series involves pure, straightforward stories that readers can relate to. "*Tor* sticks in my head because it gets down to basics," he says. "The action occurs in a setting without heavy accouterments. There are no automobiles whizzing by.

"Their thoughts are mainly on getting by from day to day. Interestingly enough, the same basic thoughts and emotions that run through us today haven't varied that much from caveman times. We're looking to make a living, to put bread on the table, to be accepted for the kind of work that we do. All of those same basic tenets had to apply at that time in order for people to survive as they do today.

"It's very much a back-to-basics story, however, dealing with the same sort of emotional and practical elements that affect people today. What I've tried to do with this story is make people identify with the caveman's life. A person today would react to enemies and terrors from outside in the same way as people who lived during Stone Age times."

New readers will have no trouble enjoying this series, says Kubert, since *Tor* is set in a world of its own, and any preknowledge of the hero is unnecessary. The four-issue series also briefly retells the character's origin.

"This story really goes back to the beginning of Tor—how he was born, where he was born, about his parents and how he became a wanderer," the artist says. "The first book deals with how Tor became alienated from his family and his father's tribe. He becomes an outcast. The second story sees Tor on the run, as he becomes involved with another tribe that wants to use him as a sacrifice. In the third issue, he must escape from that danger, and return to his original tribe and face his father's murderers."

Kubert is plotting and writing *Tor*, in addition to doing the artwork; he says he carefully scripts everything out before he starts to draw. "I start out with an empty page," he says. "Particularly with comic books and comic strips, my feeling is pretty much the same. I use the illustrations to tell the story, because the illustrations do not and can not stand by themselves. The medium is telling a picture with those stories. The perfect comic strip is one where there's a perfect marriage between story and art, where neither one outdoes the other.

"When I'm doing the writing, I divorce myself completely from the job of the artist," he says. "I concentrate on story completely and totally—I am no longer *the* artist, I'm taking on the job of supplying the story for *an* artist. Every writer in comics has to think visually, in order to make this medium work. When I'm finished with the writing, I then take my writer's hat off and put on my artist hat. I try to do what I've done all my life as a cartoonist when I've worked on anybody else's writing: To take the story a half-step beyond what the writer requested."

"As far as I'm concerned, *Tor* is going to continue," asserts Joe Kubert.

Kubert may be best known to readers for his comics work for DC in the '50s, '60s and '70s; although he worked on numerous titles, he's probably best known for drawing *Hawkman*, *Viking Prince* and the company's war titles, including *Our Army at War*, which featured Sgt. Rock. Kubert (who discussed his career in CS #11) has been mostly absent from drawing comics in recent years, after opening the Joe Kubert School in Dover, New Jersey. The Kubert School has since become an established training ground for up-and-coming comics artists, but its success only delayed his return to comics drawing. He recently emerged with the *Abraham Stone* graphic novel and a short story for *Ghost Rider: Spirits of Vengeance*, and says he's looking forward to doing comics again on a regular basis.

"I did the job for *Ghost Rider* because my sons were involved, and they asked me to work with them," he says. "They had had problems and asked me to help them out, so I pitched in unhesitatingly. It was a terrific experience for me; I just loved it.

"But, I'm getting back into comics because the school is doing well. My daughter-in-law, who runs the place, has freed me up so that I'm now able to do what I've really wanted to do. The only reason that I haven't really been able to get into the work as much as I would have liked in the past 10 or 15 years is because the school had taken so much of my time. It's ironic, because I didn't start the school to have another career—quite the opposite. I wouldn't have started the school if I had known that it was going to take so much of my time away from drawing. I figured that I would keep the school pretty small so that I could continue my own career as an artist. That didn't quite work out! Little by little, it took more and more of my time, and despite the fact that I had been an editor at DC for 25 years or so, I just couldn't continue. I was doing all kinds of covers, all kinds of work, but nothing that I could really sink my teeth into."

Kubert explains that he started his school out of gratitude to the older artists who taught him, returning the favor by training the comics artists of tomorrow.

"The teaching situation is really a payback for all of the help that I've received," he declares. "The school is an extension of all of the experiences that I had getting into the business. *Every* guy that I ever came across in the

(continued on page 64)

Art: B.B Reinhold Spyke ® Trademark & Copyright 1983 Mike Baron & Bill Reinhold/Courtesy Marvel Comics

Why I Like Spyke & Feud & Nexus & Badger & Punisher & Archer & Armstrong & Mr. T, Too

When it comes to writing comics, Mike Baron gets a little help from his friends.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

If Mike Baron isn't the busiest writer in comics, it's not for lack of trying. He's currently scripting *Spyke* and *Feud*, two new limited series for Epic Comics' "Heavy Hitters" line, in addition to stints on *Punisher*, *Nexus* and plans for a wide variety of other titles.

The writer describes *Spyke* as "free-form science fiction" centering on a society that travels between planets via ritual murder, and an ordinary American guy called Spyke who gets sucked into their world. Spyke is a security specialist who somehow becomes involved with the aliens and winds up on Squall, their home world.

"Unfortunately, the only way to get off this horrific planet is through ritual murder," says Baron. "When he finds out he has to kill people to get home, it doesn't sit well with him!"

The idea for *Spyke* arose long ago.

Photo: Courtesy Mike Baron

"I just try to surprise myself," says Mike Baron, when it comes to his writing.

"I had it kicking around for years," Baron says. "It was just one of those crazy ideas that may have been the result of my love for Philip José Farmer. I don't know why, but *Spyke* strikes me as a Farmer-type idea. I've always liked the idea of crazy, arbitrary rules that govern the most basic facets of our lives, and how they would alter them. Farmer did a lot of stuff like that."

Baron is the co-creator of *Nexus*, a man who dreams of—and assassinates—mass murderers, and *The Badger*, an insane costumed hero; he says *Spyke* is unlike anything he has ever done before.

"There are many influences to draw on with my own creations, but I try not to do too much cross-pollination," Baron declares. "*Spyke* is a puree of the many pop influences that I've absorbed over the years, and I would be hard-pressed to trace them back to any

Art: Lurene Haines/Courtesy Malibu Comics

A mini-series from Malibu Comics, *Cat People* is "a psycho-sexual horror story."

hard sources—except for Philip José Farmer. I haven't done anything in the past that's close to this. *Spyke* is hard-edged with action elements, especially at first, but it veers off into dark fantasy. Other people were kind enough to compare it to Roger Zelazny, but that's really not inappropriate."

The four-issue *Spyke* limited series begins with a visit from Sonia U'det, daughter of a dying billionaire. Her father wants to die in peace, but a group of environmental terrorists is out to kill him. "Spyke gets sucked into it all, because Sonia is a powerful woman," he says. "She's not what she seems—she actually represents one of seven royal families from Squall, a planet that wants to control as many of Earth's resources as possible. The rival families have also infiltrated Earth, and they've all arrived here through ritual murder. They like it here on Earth, and they're determined to stay.

"Their spiritual and political leader is the Conal of U'det, and we see the process which produces magic. I've backed up *Spyke* with a novelette in each issue which discloses the Conal's personal notes. It's a prose story that reveals how he became their religious leader, with illustrations by Joe Quesada."

After the first book's blazing Earthbound action, the scene shifts to the planet Squall. "When he lands inside the palace, the Conal has to explain it to him," says Baron. "Their entire planet resembles the conditions of cities like Calcutta—an impossible-to-sustain population density, no privacy, chronic shortages of food, filth in the air and water and absolute desperation among the people.

"There are people who act as 'gates,' or means of travel to other planets if they are killed. So, people sometimes go berserk and lash out in a rage, hoping to strike a 'gate,' and somehow escape the misery of their lives. Our hero is thrust into this situation—the absolute worst civilization can become."

Baron notes that fans of his *Punisher* stories should enjoy the series, though Spyke is quite different from the costumed vigilante. "Both [*Spyke* artist] Reinhold and I worked on *The Punisher*, and there's some *Punisher*-type action in the first issue—it's a hard-hitting story," notes Baron. "But, once we get off Earth, it no longer bears any relationship to *The Punisher*. I always tried to do that as a very realistic book, with no magic or science fiction if I could help it."

The current collaboration between Baron and Reinhold (*Ghost Rider/Blaze: Spirits of Vengeance*) came about following their work together on *The Punisher*. "It was just good timing," Baron explains. "I had the story, and called him up just when he was looking for his next project."

"Usually, I just illustrate Mike's scripts," says Reinhold. "With *Spyke*, I tried to give him more input than normal—I wanted to be a bigger part of it, since we were creating *everything* for the first time. It's mostly his ideas, with me supplying visuals and a few ideas here and there."

Spyke features coloring by Linda Lessman, who also teamed with Reinhold and Baron on the Punisher graphic novel *Intruder*. Reinhold says their collaboration with Baron is an easy one due to their past experience. Unlike most comics writers, Baron does rough thumbnail layouts to accompany his scripts, which his artists can use as a guideline.

"I'm very comfortable working with Mike," says Reinhold. "I've gotten used to working with his sketches. Some people are intimidated and feel like they have to follow what he has, but he always tells artists to ignore his

"I've always been an admirer of Mr. T," Baron says, which led him to write two issues of Now's *Mr. T and the T Force*.

Art: Neal Adams/ Courtesy Now Comics

Art: Mark Nelson

The *Feud* world consists of four interdependent races—Stokers, Skids, Grunts and Kites—who don't always like each other.

Art: Steve Rude/Nexus: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Dark Horse Comics

"I'm constantly working on *Nexus*," notes Baron.

layouts. He doesn't expect them to be followed whatsoever as art. I stick close to them for descriptions, but unless something really catches my eye, I usually ignore them and do what I want. It's like working with a full script, rather than just a plot."

Reinhold says the fantastic elements of *Spyke* appealed to him. "The interdimensional side of it made me want to do it," he says. "Just doing anything from scratch is interesting to me. I was ready to do it even before I knew what it was going to be, but even more so when its interdimensional side came up, because I was able to get into SF and fantasy. I did a little with the Silver Surfer graphic novel [*Homecoming*], but otherwise fantasy is pretty rare for me. After having to draw the correct gun all the time on *The Punisher*, it's more fun to do science fiction, where I can invent all the costumes and architecture!"

Baron's other Epic limited series, *Feud*, is a fantasy story told in collaboration with artist Mark Nelson.

"Mark and I were talking about doing something together, and I asked him what he wanted to work on," says Baron. "He wanted to do a story with some characters that he created; crazy, dinosaur-based animals. I looked at his drawings and thought we could do something with them.

"*Feud* is really all based on Mark's creations. It's a grim story about four races that are interdependent, but also hate each other's guts. They're like cats and dogs, locked in a perpetual struggle on this planet. I guess it's a funny animal soap opera, except they're not funny animals—the drawings have so much impact, the style is about as far from funny as you can get!"

The four different races in *Feud* are based on earth, air, fire and water. "The Skids are the water race and do all of the fishing. The Kites live in the air and look like pterodactyls; they're the only ones who can create music and art. The Grunts are the heavy, earth-moving creatures, who raise the crops and mine the ore; this is used by the Stokers, the fire beings who build very complicated things—they're the technologically gifted race.

"Each race has a huge castle. They didn't build them, but sort of inherited them in a game of musical chairs that has been going on forever. There are

"I had the idea for *Spyke* kicking around for years," the writer says. "I've always liked the idea of crazy, arbitrary rules that govern the most basic facets of our lives."

Art: Bill Reinhold

Punisher Art: Trademark & Copyright 1993 Marvel Entertainment Group Inc.

continuously revealing surprises in the castles' lower depths."

Baron (who discussed past comics work in CS #1) admits that this project may take some of his fans by surprise. "All of my projects are offbeat, but this one certainly surprised *me*!"

The writer says he became involved with *Feud*, because he admired Nelson's style. "When I see an artist whose work I like, I always want to work with them," Baron says. "And if they have an idea, then so much the better! Mark told me his ideas and how he envisioned the story. I did my usual thing, and drew each page by hand. I sent them to him, and we worked it all out. He takes what I give him, and if he wants to change it, he does."

Feud begins with—appropriately—a long-standing animosity: the air-dwelling Kites have a grudge against the Stokers.

"The Stokers' furnaces are pumping a lot of shit into the air, and they won't respond to the Kites' entreaties to clean it up," explains Baron. "The Kites, who aren't really very good at making war, decide to fix the Stokers by tricking the Skids into going to war against the Stokers. They do this by kidnapping the Skid royal heir, and setting it up so it looks like the Stokers have done it. So, the Skids are furious, and they decide to swamp the Stoker castle with a tidal wave."

Baron admits that writing extremely different characters is a challenge, and he sometimes has to struggle to give each of them their own voice.

"I try to write all types of characters," he says. "I force myself to adopt the persona of different characters, out of my own head. If William Styron wrote *The Confessions of Nat Turner* today, people would say, 'You can't write that book because you're a white man.' But art is the license to take yourself out of your head and imagine a different experience. That's what artists are trying to do all the time."

Citing the Badger as his favorite character, and also the easiest for him to write, Baron notes that the characters he's currently scripting are about as far from his mind-set as he can imagine. "I'm writing a series now featuring Scarlett and Sheena—two 12-year-old girls—and I'm really happy with the work I've done so far. It's mostly done by close observations and the ability to imagine," he says.

Drawn by Adam Hughes, the upcoming *Scarlett and Sheena* series planned for Dark Horse Comics features the daughters of Nexus, who returned to comics in 1992. *Nexus* was tied up in legal limbo for several years before Dark Horse resumed publishing with *Nexus the Liberator* and *Nexus: Alien Justice*. Fans of *Nexus* will be happy to hear that Baron isn't letting his other writing interfere with his love for the hero.

"I'm constantly working on *Nexus*,"

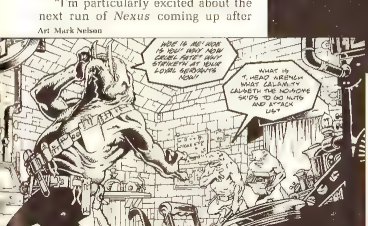
Not working regularly on *The Punisher*, Baron is putting together a Microchip origin series.

Baron announces. "And I have many *Nexus* projects in the works. Before next year's *Nexus* project, which the Dude [co-creator Steve Rude] will be drawing, is 'The Mezzrow Tour of the Galaxy.' Mezzrow is a rock 'n' roller from *Nexus*, and this is the story of his tour. It's going to include a CD or cassette of music that appears in the story. You can play the CD while you read the comic, and see the band when it comes to a galaxy near you!"

Nexus's popularity has managed to overcome his publishing problems, but his durability is no surprise to Baron. "I get my greatest satisfaction working on *Nexus* and *The Badger*," he says. "I guess we have more story to tell—it just remains fresh for us.

"I'm particularly excited about the next run of *Nexus* coming up after *Alien Justice*—I was excited about that, but this one is going to be even hotter," says Baron. "I don't know what the theme of the series will be yet, because I just started writing the stories. It concerns Horatio Hellpop's deal with the new Merk. The stories are sharper, more intense and highly focused than ever before. There's more depth and irony to them."

Art: Mark Nelson


HOW IS HE? HOW IS YOUR HOPALONG CASSIDY? ARE YOU PUTTING HIS STRENGTH AT YOUR LEVEL NOW?
WHAT IS THIS? A DEAD MEDIUM WHERE ALL THE LAUGHTER AND SCREAMS GO? DO YOU HUNTS AND ATTACK US?

***Bruce Lee Stories*, coming in September from Malibu, is "like the old *Hopalong Cassidy* comics—you take the character and put him in real life."**

"Mark Nelson wanted to do a story with some dinosaur-based animals," explains Baron.

Art: Val Mayerik/Courtesy Malibu Comics

Both *Nexus* and Baron have evolved and gone through many changes over the years; Baron notes that his writing style has progressed along the way. "I think I've become less wordy, at least as far as *Nexus* is concerned," he says. "I'm communicating more story with less words, which is good. I'm always happy to remove words, and when I compare my modern *Nexus* writing with the writing 10 years ago, I see many things I would change."

Taking several years off from *Nexus* ultimately helped the series and the writing. "It did help to take a break, and I'm glad it's not monthly now. It gives me time to think about these stories. Dude has been helping me out with story ideas, and I think the result is more intense stories. He's even more excited about *Nexus* than I am!"

Baron's other popular creation returns next year in a two-part Dark Horse deluxe series. "I hope we're going to have a special *Badger* story drawn by Jill [*Sandman*] Thompson—I think she's going to do all the art," says Baron. "I'm very excited about it. The fans will be shocked but delighted, because I'm retelling the Badger's origin in much greater detail. It's going to be much more realistic than the previous versions, every bit as exciting and violent—I want fans to be prepared for a major shock! It's going to be more of a psychological tale, because I've learned a lot about multiple personalities over the years. Jill's style lends itself to that. But it's also going to be kickass action, very exciting comic book art, because Jill wants to show that she can do that."

The writer continues to script *The Punisher*, though not on as regular a basis as he did in the past. "I'm working on a Microchip origin series with Carl Potts, and Bill Reinhold and I have a graphic novel in the works that's just stunning," he reveals. "We really need 100 pages to tell this story, but we're going to do it in two special issues."

After writing this year's *Magnus Yearbook* for Valiant, Baron takes over the scripting of *Archer and Armstrong* beginning with issue #13, with art by Rags [*Black Condor*] Morales. "I see it as kind of a ribald buddy movie," he says. "I hope my stories will be very similar to [creator] Barry Windsor-Smith's work on the series."

In addition to all of the above projects, Baron has not one, but *three* other series to write. Malibu's six-issue *Bruce Lee Stories*, to be drawn by Val Mayerik, will tell fictional stories that feature the late martial arts superstar. "It's like the old *Hopalong Cassidy* comics—you take the character that he presented on the screen and put him in real life," says Baron. "People who want to see what it'll look like should check out my last *Kato* mini-series, which is also drawn by Val."

Cat People is a six-issue Malibu limited series based on the film, with art by Lurene Haines. "It's a psychosexual horror story about the Cat People that walk among us."

Baron is even planning to write two issues of *T and the T Force* for Now Comics, starring the one and only Mr. T. "I've always been an admirer of Mr. T," he smiles. "It's going to be a tough urban commando series without the firepower; he'll be trying to keep kids on the straight and narrow, and combat the influence of drugs and gangs."

After more than a decade in comics, and plenty of comic scripts to come, Mike Baron says he doesn't have a problem staying interested, keeping it fun and avoiding exhaustion.

"I just try to surprise myself," he says. "Sometimes I just have to let things go and hope that a surprise sneaks up on me. You just have to quit working and go out to smell the roses!"

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James Sturm warns that we are what we eat. And breakfast is killing us all.

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STALKING

THE CEREAL KILLER

By HARLEY JEBENS

Dougie the Frog dug Sugar Duds. In fact, that's what the spindly frog said in all his Kelcog cereal commercials. When the announcer's voice would intone, "Well, Dougie, how were they?," Dougie would look in the camera, flash all his viewers a big wink, and say, "I Doug 'em!"

Now Dougie's dead. Of a heart attack. At 39.

Keiler was the cuckoo bird whose schtick was to taste his cereal, Cocoa Bits, then go into a sugar-crazed fit of euphoria, jumping up and down, waving his arms, shouting out, "I'm Cuckoo for Cocoa Bits! I'm Cuckoo for Cocoa Bits!"

But, he was a diabetic, and one too many bowls of his cereal did him in. One day, Keiler the Cuckoo Bird lapsed into a coma. He too died.

Schmedly the Elephant is a washed-up alcoholic.

Sure Shot Shirland is a gambling addict.

All victims of the Cereal Killer.

Carbunkle used to be the spokesman for his own cereal. Now, however, he comes up with ideas for new cereals and finds spokesmen, or spokesfrogs or spokescuckoo birds, whose job it is to pitch those sugar-laden concoctions to kids.

He's the protagonist, if not exactly the hero, of James Sturm's black-and-white comic *The Cereal Killings*. And as Burt the Rabbit, himself the pitchman for a brand of sugary-coated children's cereal, said of Carbunkle, "Marshmallows in cereal, the 'Sugar berry.' He came up with some killer ideas. Who's more responsible for Dougie and Keiler's career than Carbunkle? And if their cereal killed 'em, then Carbunkle's an accomplice."

It's thoughts like *that* that Carbunkle would rather not dwell on. But it's thoughts like that, unsettling thoughts about how our lifestyles and careers affect our lives, about how what we eat in a sense defines what we are, that Sturm is playing with in this series, hoping his readers might ask the same questions of themselves.

Photos & All Art Courtesy James Sturm

"You are what you eat," explains *The Cereal Killings* creator James Sturm, shown here age two.

Sturm describes his New York-spent youth as the typical suburban experience, so perhaps it's fitting that the seed of the idea that would grow into *The Cereal Killings* was planted during one of those stereotypically suburban experiences: Summer camp.

"My mom wouldn't buy the sugared cereals," explains Sturm, "because I guess she read somewhere that they were bad for you. At summer camp, I would always go for the sugared cereals. One of my favorites was Kellogg's Cocoa Krispies; it was like Rice Krispies but chocolate, and the box featured Tusk-Tusk the Chocolate Elephant, who would make his trunk like a horn and blow. And one day, I must have been 13, I reached for the box, and Tusk-Tusk wasn't there. Tusk-Tusk the Chocolate Elephant was *gone*. And on the box instead were Snap, Crackle and Pop.

"So, I was like, 'Man, what happened to Tusk-Tusk? Where is he? Is he playing cribbage with Jimmy Hoffa somewhere?' I was concerned. It was kind of a joke, but I started thinking about it. 'Snap, Crackle and Pop—first they had their own cereal and now they have Cocoa Krispies.' Then, Tony Jr. was gone and Frosted Rice featured Snap, Crackle and Pop. I thought, 'Man, these elves are taking over. Soon, Tony the Tiger's gonna be out. These guys are really starting something here.'"

That's basically the premise behind *The Cereal Killings*. Snip the Elf is a cereal spokesman, with nine cereals to his credit, like Rice Crunchies, Almond Crunchies and Marshmallow Crunchies. But he's also the head of the Kelcog corporation. No clue has yet arisen in the series as to what happened to Anton Tygre, former Kelcog head, or to Snip's brothers, who used to be seen on the boxes with him. What has been revealed is that Snip is a merciless tyrant who jealously guards the propriety of "his" cereals, those featuring his likeness.

In Sturm's universe, the cereal industry itself has fallen on hard times, what with the newspapers and TV stations producing stories, after the deaths of Dougie and Keiler, with titles like "Cereal Killer Strikes Again," or "Cereal Killer Rampant." And then there are spokesmen like Shirland landing *his* name in the papers due to brawls in casinos and paternity suits. With all that negative publicity, it's no wonder that sales are falling.

But Carbunkle has a plan, a plan that he knows will restore the cereal industry's flagging fortunes. He hopes it will also still the nightmares plaguing his sleep ever since Dougie's death, ease his troubled conscience and quiet those disturbing thoughts that keep whispering to him that he *is* responsible for his co-workers' deaths, that he *is* a cereal killer.

"You don't search for material," Sturm says, "it finds you. Years after summer camp, when I first started working on *The Cereal Killings*, it made a lot of sense, because it had so

CARBUNKLE
DOUGIE?
SCHMEDLY? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I WANT TO TALK TO YOU.
DON'T LISTEN TO THEM, CARBUNKLE!
CHARLIE WAS A DRUNK AND A GOD DAMN LIAR!
YOU DON'T WANT TO LISTEN TO CHARLIE...
CHARLIE, CHARLIE, ONE MORE... WE'LL CLOSE THIS PLACE DOWN...

"I'm really coming at comics from a writer's standpoint," Sturm explains.

many components that intrigued me.

"I think of that old adage, 'You are what you eat.' That's just not in the food sense. You are what you eat as far as what you take in, and when you work certain jobs your whole life, you *become* what you do.

"These cereal characters have deluded themselves. I mean, what are they doing? They're selling cereal. And they're not really selling food. They're just packaging something. The food they're selling is this processed, sugar-laden *thing* that's really bad for you. Advertising, in a big way, kind of fosters our addictions in this culture, and what they—these cereal characters and the advertising industry—are teaching people, by selling this thing, is to indiscriminately consume, regardless of its effects.

"And that's what the characters in this story have decided to do—indiscriminately consume. Basically, that's what this whole book is about—how this behavior is boomeranging back to them. And these people in the book who are all dying, they're not dying of axe murders. It's just those little nagging injuries that come back at you when you've lived a lifestyle—what you've eaten, and what you believe in—that come back to haunt you.

"*The Cereal Killings* also has to do with pop culture and iconography," Sturm says. "You know, it's just one of the things I love. I went to India for six weeks a few years ago, and in India, they have these big festivals. They have these giant floats of Ganesha and their deities and they would march them down the street, these big papier-maché floats. I thought, 'We don't have anything like that in our culture.'

"And then it dawned upon me, 'Well, sure we do. The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.' But instead, you get the Quick Bunny and Ronald McDonald, like this consumer mythology. And that idea intrigued me.

"It was also about cartoons. I've studied cartooning, I love cartoonists, I am a cartoonist. It seemed these breakfast cereal characters were a fun group to handle.

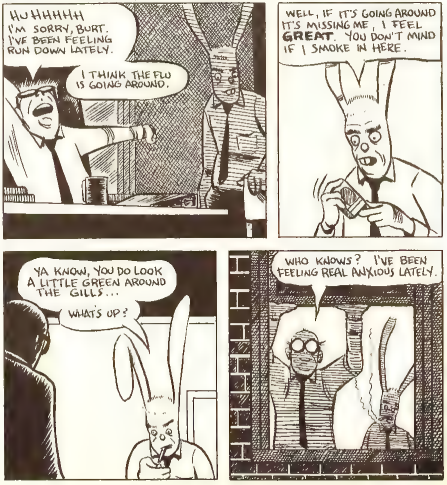
"For all those reasons, this story intrigued me. And also, as I go on, there are many different levels in it working for me, which is why I can work on a project for three years."

In fact, Sturm had already done four drafts of his nine (possibly 10)-chapter graphic novel before he even started on the first chapter (itself re-drawn before ever seeing print). "When the whole thing is collected as a novel, as a book," Sturm says, "which is how it was *intended* to be handled, the first chapter is going to be totally re-drawn. It's almost like a work-in-progress. In the fourth chapter, which I'm working on now, after I took four months off due to an eye injury from which he has since recovered], my drawing seems to have gotten better."

"Carbunkle is having a mid-life crisis, if you will," Sturm explains. "He's realizing what he has done his whole life, and that maybe it's *not* so great. And he has projected all of his anxieties on this Scarecrow character."

The Scarecrow was the spokesman for Kelcog's Corn Cereal, launched in the 1950s and discontinued within a year. In fact, Snip tells Carbunkle that the Scarecrow left the company under somewhat "suspicious" circumstances. Carbunkle is convinced that the

"Carbunkle is having a mid-life crisis," Sturm notes. "He's realizing what he has done his whole life, and that maybe it's not so great."

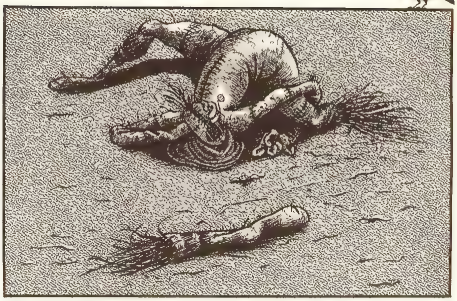

HUHHHHH I'M SORRY, BURT. I'VE BEEN FEELING RUN DOWN LATELY.
I THINK THE FLU IS GOING AROUND.
WELL, IF IT'S GOING AROUND IT'S MISSING ME. I FEEL GREAT. YOU DON'T MIND IF I SMOKE IN HERE.
YA KNOW, YOU DO LOOK A LITTLE GREEN AROUND THE GILLS...
WHAT'S UP?
WHO KNOWS? I'VE BEEN FEELING REAL ANXIOUS LATELY.

Scarecrow and his cereal could be the industry's savior.

"It's all timing," Carbunkle says. "In the '50s, unless you were sugar-covered and marketed for kids, you didn't stand a chance. Those kids are now adults. It's a whole new ballgame. What the public wants is to be reassured that we aren't just here today and gone tomorrow. Bringing back an old-timer makes perfect sense now. And the Scarecrow says it all: Longevity! Heartland! Nostalgia!"

Sturm says, "I refer to the Scarecrow as my Jesus character. Carbunkle believes, from what he understands, that the Scarecrow is the redemption; if Carbunkle can get the Scarecrow, Carbunkle will be born again. He will be redeemed. Meanwhile, the Scarecrow is gone." (He was dismissed from Kelcog after his cereal's failure and, as far as the readers know, hasn't been seen since. *The Cereal Killings* follows Carbunkle's frantic search for this shadowy figure.)

He may have "Doug 'em," but Dougie the Frog succumbed to the cereal killer, and died of a heart attack at 39.



The search for the Scarecrow is Carbunkle's journey to redemption. "If Carbunkle can get the Scarecrow, Carbunkle will be born again."

In the novel's fourth chapter, "Shirland just lost his job and is coming apart more and more. All of the characters are unraveling. Schmedly starts to really lose it. Somebody dies then, another cereal killing."

Sturm's interest in comics began at an early age. He says, "I can really remember *the* incident when I thought, 'Hey, I want to start getting comics.' It must have been when I was in kindergarten or first grade, there was a kids' TV show on weekend mornings in New York City called *Wonderama*. And one time, I saw Stan Lee on the program and I thought he was really cool. He talked about comics, and I think they might have shown some comics on TV. I was in a mall with my parents the next day and I saw a copy of *Fantastic Four*. They bought it for me, and I've been into it ever since. I've had spans where I've ignored comics for a while, but then when I've come back, I've brought more stuff to it and that has only helped me as an artist and creator.

"When I got to college [the University of Wisconsin at Madison, which he attended from 1983 through 1987], I started with a couple of little failed strips in the student newspaper. And then I did a comic strip called *The Adventures of Down & Out Dawg* at the University of Wisconsin's *Daily Cardinal*. And that was a huge success. At first, it was just a thing to parody cute animal comics, then it became more of an adventure strip. That went on for about a year-and-a-half."

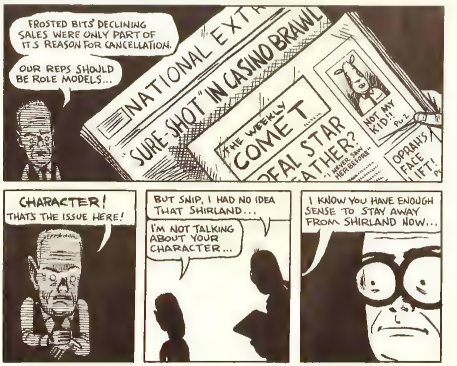
From doing a daily comic strip, Sturm worked himself onto bigger and bigger stories, from three-page pieces to 10-page stories to his current work, which will be a graphic novel numbering about 200 pages when complete.

The genesis of *The Cereal Killings* began when Sturm was doing some work for a weekly humor magazine in Madison called *The Onion*.

"I was doing a strip called *The Scarecrow*, and many of the themes and characters in this graphic novel appeared there. I would kind of wrestle with it. I didn't really structure the whole thing out. It was going week to week. It was like a transition between what I *was* doing and what I wanted to do. It was a failed experiment, but I did learn quite a bit from it."

From Madison, Sturm moved on to New York City, where he received a master's of fine arts degree in illustration. While in New York, he worked as

"You don't search for material, it finds you," says Sturm.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NOT MY KID!
OPRAH'S FACE LIFT!
CHARACTER! THAT'S THE ISSUE HERE!
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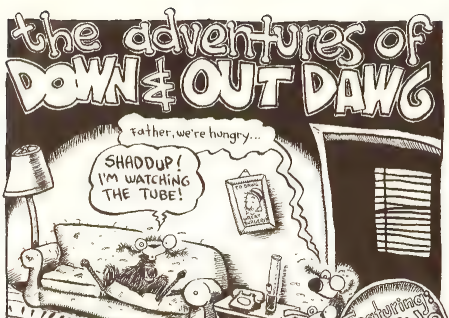
I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT YOUR CHARACTER...
I KNOW YOU HAVE ENOUGH SENSE TO STAY AWAY FROM SHIRLAND NOW...



***Adventures of Down & Out Dog* "was a thing to parody cute animal comics, then it became more of an adventure strip."**

an assistant at *Raw* magazine, the premier showcase for alternative cartoonists in America, which is where he met *Raw*'s associate editor, Bob Sikoryak. Sikoryak has proven to be a valuable mentor, giving Sturm advice and helping him shape what would turn out to be *The Cereal Killings*.

After moving to Seattle, where he works as the art director of a local alternative newsweekly called *The Stranger*, Sturm did a one-shot humor magazine for Fantagraphics called *Check-Up*. (Fantagraphics publishes *The Cereal Killings*.)

"I'm really coming at comics from a writer's standpoint," Sturm says, but his experiences at *Raw* opened his eyes to the medium's graphic possibilities. "For instance, I decided I wanted to rule the panels, 'cause if I'm going to have a serious kind of novel, and if I'm going to have funny cereal box characters running around, I want to do everything I can visually to make it as sober as possible. For me, that was ruling lines. And making the perspective as realistic, within its own terms, as possible.

"Now that I've been doing it, one of the things I've also realized is that the comics medium is more like a play than a novel. Because, in plays, when you look at sets, you just have to put in a few things to suggest space. And if you look at my work, it's the same thing. In this warehouse scene, when Schmedly and the Scarecrow are talking, there are just a few crates and the rest is black, and yet you know exactly where you are. It's also like a play because there are a limited amount of characters."

Dr. Boxer is a creation of Sturm's that appears in *Check-Up*, as well as in a back-up feature in *Cereal Killings* #1. "That was kind of a goofy character emblematic of what western medicine is all about for me—very evasive, very violent. It seems like in our culture, if you have a disease, and let's say on the scale of one to 10, the disease is an eight, and your immune system is a three, the way our medicine works is we try to pummel that eight as hard as we can to smash it down to a three so your body can handle it. And if, in the course of pummeling that eight down to a three, you damage some of your other organs or something else, so be it! A better way to do it is if you have an eight and your immune system is at a three, then do something to help that three get up to an eight. Which is a more holistic viewpoint. Dr. Boxer was a funny way for me to play with that notion."

Sturm has backed up the fantasy element of *The Cereal Killings* series with a tremendous amount of research. "I've done a lot of personal research as far as food and health issues," the cartoonist says, "and that's great research because there's an immediate benefit that you can feel and experience. As far as for the book, I've done a lot of looking into the history of breakfast cereals in America and who invented what characters."

The writer/artist even interviewed Jack Keil, who co-created Sonny the Cuckoo Bird, the cartoon spokesman for General Mills' Cocoa Puffs, and created Officer McGruff, the crime prevention dog who advises children to "Take a Bite out of Crime."

"Keil is the guy who jumped up on a table at a GM board meeting, and flailed his arms and said, 'I'm cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs,' and gave Sonny his voice. I called him to interview him—he was very nice, an advertising man. The irony of that is, in my *Down & Out Dawg* strip, one of the main characters was Officer McGruff. Officer McGruff became Judge McGruff, and Judge McGruff became Father McGruff; he had all these transformations. I also did this little book called *Spoonful of New York*, Sonny the Cuckoo Bird—the Real Story. I thought, 'Wow, it's ironic that here I am butchering two of this guy's characters.' Or re-inventing them, or re-interpreting them.

"Every character in *The Cereal Killings*, except the Scarecrow, is based on a cereal box character, past or present. At one time, everybody was somebody on a cereal box," he says.

"And Carbunkle comes from—well, the *S.S. Guppie* was Cap'n Crunch's ship and he had this crew made up of characters named the Sea Dog, Carlisle, Alfie and Broom Hilda. Well, Broom Hilda became Brenda (Carbunkle's wife), Carlisle or Alfie—one of those guys—became Carbunkle.

"There's a little bit of my dad in Carbunkle. There's a little bit of this kind of an everyman, Charlie Brown kind of guy. And he was a good focal point. I looked up 'Carbunkle' in the dictionary. It turns out the definition is either 'a festering boil' or 'a precious gem.' And I thought that's really neat, it can go either way.

"As the book develops, Carbunkle starts putting his life into perspective. And he always saw his life in a very clear-cut kind of way. Anxiety and guilt really start tearing him apart at the seams. Carbunkle *will* have an epiphany and change. For all the characters in the book, it's a situation where they must 'change or die.'

"There's a college basketball coach who describes the NCAA tournament, where you win a game and you go on and whoever wins becomes national champion, this way: 'Survive and advance, survive and advance.' And these characters aren't surviving, so they're not advancing. It's either change or die, and mostly everybody in the book dies—not everybody, but many of the characters are going to die. Carbunkle—hopefully he won't die. I'm pulling for him, but in order for him not to die, he has 'got to change his evil ways,' as Santana says."

"For me," James Sturm says, "the cereal killer is our culture. It's our lifestyle. It's ourselves. To escape this cereal killer is a matter of waking up."

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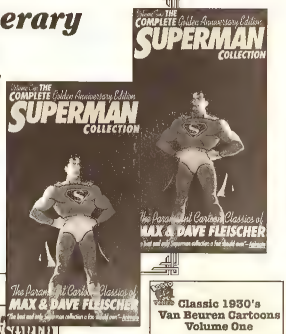
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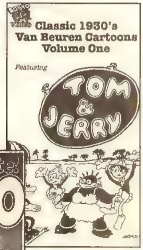

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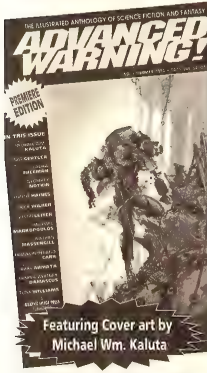

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Tor

(continued from page 50)

business has helped me every which way—nobody ever turned their backs on me, even when I was just an obnoxious kid trying to get started. Before I started the school, I and every guy I knew would help anybody who we felt was really serious about wanting to get into this business. I had always felt it would be great if, instead of doing it on a hit-or-miss basis, there was one place that somebody who was really dedicated to getting into the business could pick up all of the necessary information. And that's why I started the school."

Now that Kubert is off and running with *Tor*, he says he's anxious to keep working on the series past the four-issue limited run.

"As far as I'm concerned, *Tor* is going to continue," he says. "What form it'll take after these four issues, I really can't say—I haven't worked beyond that. But, I don't think I'll ever drop the character. I happen to enjoy doing him. There's a tremendous growth potential for *Tor* to go in a much further direction than has been touched upon so far. I have a lot of stuff in the back of my head, and I think we can take the character in many directions."

The timing appears promising for a prehistoric story like *Tor*, particularly in a year when the upcoming *Jurassic Park* looks to be a blockbuster film, and dinosaurs are more popular than ever. "There has always been an interest in dinosaurs. Kids have always had an interest in dinosaurs. *I've* always had an interest in dinosaurs!" he laughs. "I'm only hoping it carries through."

Although *Tor* does feature dinosaurs in some stories, they usually remain in the background. The creatures will appear in the limited series, even though they were virtually extinct by the time man appeared. "I'm giving some justification for them. The shark is supposed to be a prehistoric animal, dating back to the beginning of time, and there are other animals around like that which are still alive today. When I put the story together, I'm trying to make it as plausible as possible," he explains.

"I'm *not* trying to do an *Alley Oop* type of dinosaur strip. I'm trying to reason out why certain things can happen, why there's a possibility that at least remnants of dinosaurs could have actually existed at the same time man came around. But, dinosaurs aren't the story's focus—Tor is. It's not a man vs. dinosaur story at all."

Kubert admits another advantage to reviving *Tor* is that he owns the character. "At this stage, I'm really not interested in doing somebody else's character. If it wasn't *Tor*, I would have worked on something else. I've got a bunch of other stuff, including, incidentally, *The Redeemer*, because I got the rights back from DC. There are other ideas and storylines in the drawer that belong to me that haven't even been published at this time. I selected *Tor* simply because it was the thing I *wanted* to do."

"At this stage, I'm really not interested in doing somebody else's character."

Even though he hasn't been working regularly in comics for years, the Kubert name is well-known to new comics fans through the art of his sons Adam and Andy. The elder Kubert is justifiably proud of the acclaim being awarded his offspring.

"It's the most gratifying thing in the world, and to me, it's nothing short of a miracle," he says. "The chances of two sons coming along in the same family, getting into the art area, the same as their father, loving the business and loving the work as much as I do, to me is nothing short of a miracle. I'm more proud of them than I can say. Their work is terrific. I think they're way beyond what I was doing when I was their age!"

Joe Kubert's excitement is apparent as he discusses his revival of *Tor*, and admits drawing is his first love.

"I've been drawing all the time that the school has been going on, but not quite what I wanted to do. At this stage of the game, this is what I'm into, and this is what I'm going to be doing," he says. "And, I'm having the best time of my life!"

Fantastic Four

(continued from page 27)

fits his massive frame like a glove.

"There have been no surprises with Ben," says the athlete/actor, whose previous claim to fame was playing Super Freddy in *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5*. "He's so me, it's ridiculous. Ben's feelings get hurt really easily like mine do. When it gets down to clobbering time, I've lived those kinds of situations. I've had the turmoil in me that Ben has in him. It's a perfect match."

Sassone is ready to shoot the rooftop action, in which the Fantastic Four confront Dr. Doom.

"It would be great to use a real wacky camera angle on this shot," laments the director. "But the set is only 16 feet high and if we did that, we would lose the actors, so I guess we'll be shooting this straight on."

The director runs through an early segment of the scene in which Susan emerges onto the rooftop and walks toward Reed, who's staring off the roof ledge, contemplating his fate. It's relatively simple stuff wrapped in a handful of takes. The next set-up is quickly put in motion.

Which allows for a quick trip to the editing room and a Movieola look at some of the assembled footage. Scenes of the lab explosion, minus some FX that will be added later, look better than the budget suggests. Footage of the Thing encountering the Jeweler in his underground home is equally crisp.

The surprise is not lost on Rabiner. "For us, this is a normal production; for everybody else, it seems incredibly fast. What isn't surprising to us is that it looks real good. We may not be working with a huge budget, but you can count on one thing: It *all* winds up on the screen."

Rabiner, who reports that Stan Lee has a cameo role that "hopefully won't be cut," feels that *The Fantastic Four* will have a movie life beyond this adventure.

"This is just the origin. If we do nothing but adapt the comics, we have 30 years of source material to work with. There's a good possibility this will become a franchise."

Sassone has the lights and camera where he wants them. Suddenly, there's a commotion and a rustling of voices where the makeup trailers stand in a jumble. A familiar figure in green cloak and iron mask is making his way to the set.

Dr. Doom has arrived.

It's clobberin' time!

Mojoman

(continued from page 31)

and courts aren't doing an adequate job against crime. A superhero would feel that he or she might be able to go out and clean up the streets, but wouldn't that make the prospective Crusader Against Crime just as wrong as the criminals? You help the city by adopting a secret identity so you could bypass the law and protect yourself from legal intervention and bureaucratic red tape. But the fact remains that in the course of taking up the guise of a superhero, you run the risk of breaking the same laws you set out to preserve.

Then, there's also the risk of finding yourself stretched out on a slab with a bullet wound in your chest. If a burglar spotted you swooping down out of the darkness, then he would be within his rights to blow you away before he got bitten or something. That would end a brilliant crimefighting career real quick.

But there *could* come a time when an Ordinary Citizen will find himself in a position where he'll be driven to take a chance in order to do what's right. When that time comes, would it be altogether inappropriate to reach for a cape?

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Black

(continued from page 47)

I could have a draft done by Christmas. I said, 'Hell, I could have one by Thanksgiving!' He said, 'Seriously, do it by Christmas.' I gave it to him on Thanksgiving and he was upset. 'Why did you do it so fast? Is it any good?' I got on his bad side by doing that. The first draft would have cost $100 million to film, and that's a conservative estimate. They gave me a revised version that other writers have done, and one line of mine is [left] in it!"

Princess of Mars still hasn't been made. Neither has another film Black scripted. "My greatest regret is a Disney project called *Albert & Victoria*, about two bugs who live on the Empire State Building. It's a love story between a moth and a cockroach," he announces with a straight face. "It would have been wonderful—Victoria, the cockroach, is abducted to the penthouse where everything is glamorous, and poor Albert must tediously work his way up the building to reach her. It's a quest film!

"The original children's story was a little too simple, and they wanted it more complicated. They couldn't settle on a theme and asked me to develop it along the lines of *My Fair Lady*, if you can picture that. The cockroach gets a makeover to make her more glamorous to the moth community. Alas, she still doesn't fit in. Originally, Albert the moth was also going to be a cockroach—these are the creative decisions we have to make," he laughs. "It was an odd project, but it could have been a great deal of fun."

Black currently has a full schedule. "I'm writing a novel called *Past Perfect*, based on a script I wrote," he reveals. "It's about a time-traveling detective. The deal is, he's not a very good detective, but he has a time machine so he can just go back and watch who did the crime.

"I also have an idea one of my students suggested, about a zombie in a courtroom. It's a scenario where a crime boss is on trial and the only witness turns up dead. They think they'll have to drop the charges, but fortunately, they find a way to resurrect the witness, and he strolls into the courtroom with a spike through his head."

Zombies seem to be a recurring motif in the writer's work for television and films. Why? "They're funny," he professes. "To have a dead person doing something a live person would do really puts an insane slant on the human condition. Death is second only to sex in the number of funny things that can be said about it." Terry Black breaks out in a wide grin. "Sex, of course, is also something many people find terrifying!"

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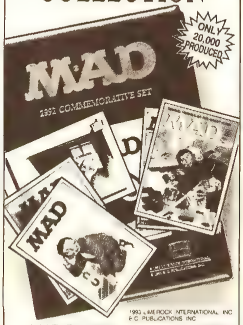

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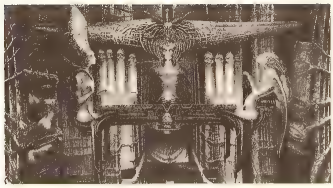

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COMICS Screen

COMICS REPORTER

All of these upcoming projects are live-action unless specified. Those listed are new or updated since last spring. **Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** Legend: S: script. D: director. P: producer. EP: executive producer. C: creator. An: animation. LA: live-action. Star-studded. HB: Hanna-Barbera. Ad: Saturday AM's Mar-kum. Wolf: Swenson RB: Runkan-Bass. WD: Disney. WB: Warner Bros. PP: Paramount. U: Universal. DH: Dark Horse. L: Topps. Fox: Fox. Lor: Lorimar. Am: Amblin. FF: Funnybook Force. Rs: Rugg Sparks. **Alts. all pros:** abbrs. of those indicated in D-, S- or C- credits elsewhere in article. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South 8th Flr. NY, NY 10016 (info as of 3/9/93)

Funny, he doesn't look like a menace. Mason Gamble plays Hank Ketcham's pint-sized *Dennis the Menace* in the Nick Castle-directed movie due this summer.

Look for the surreal in the ABC mini-series version of Bruce Wagner's comic strip *Wild Palms* (airing April 24-28). Nick Mancuso, Bebe Neuwirth, Angie Dickinson, Dana Delany, James Belushi, Kim Cattrall and Robert Loggia star in this wild mixture of soap opera and Virtual Reality. Also on hand are Ernie Hudson, David Warner and Brad Dourif.

Wild Palms Photo: Andrew Eccles/©Copyright 1993 Capital Cities/ABC

Dennis Photo: Theo Westenberger/©Copyright 1993 Warner Bros. Inc.

Addams Family. Sequel. *Addams Family Values*. PP. W/ movie cast & Carol Kane. AN series. ABC. HB.

The Airtight Garage. AN. P: Philippe Rivier. D: Moebius, Stephan Martiniere. S: Randy Lofficier.

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel.

ALIENS vs. Predator. Film. DH/Fox.

The American. Film DH/L

Animaniacs. AN syn TV. WB/Am. Fall '93.

Annie. Film. *Annie & the Castle of Terror*. D: Lewis Gilbert. Rastar. Stage musical sequel. *Annie Warbucks* Delayed (again) by financing.

Archie. LA film. S: N. & D. Ephron. DIC.

Bad Baby. AN TV. Imag.

Barbarella. LA film. Nel.

Batman. AN series. Direct to-video AN film.

Betty Boop. AN film. S: Jerry Rees. EP: Richard Fleischer, Richard Zanuck. MGM.

The Black Cat. Film.

Blackhawk. Film. Am.

Blankman. Film. C: Damon Wayans. Eric Gold. Sony.

Black Panther. Film.

W/Wesley Snipes. D: John Singleton. P: Brad Weston. Bob Beitcher. Sony.

Blade. Film.

Blondie. Film. WB.

Bonkers D. Bobcat. Syn AN series. WD. Fall '93

Casper. Film. Am. U.

Cobalt 60. AN film.

Concrete. Film. DH

The Crow. Film. S: John Shirley. D: Alex Proyas. P: Ed Pressman W/Brandon Lee. PP.

Crusader Rabbit. AN TV.

Cyberpunk. Film. S: Steve Roberts. D: Rene Manzor

Daredevil. TV. Lor. Fox.

Deadworld. Film. S: Mark Pavia (D). Jack O'Donnell (P). Dementia Brothers Pictures.

Dennis the Menace. Film. P/S: John Hughes. D: Nick Castle. WB. *Dennis the Musical* S: E. Chambers. Music: Jeff Church. Lyrics: R. Enquist, Chambers.

Dinosaurs for Hire. AN series. Fox

Dr. Off. Film. Spoof. P: Tim Reid Miramax.

Dr. Strange. Film. S/D: Wes Craven. Savoy Ent.

Doom's IV. Film. P/S: Rob Liefeld. Am.

Duckman. AN. C: Everett Peck. Klasky Csupo.

Dudley Do-Right. Film. U.

Elektra Assassin. Film. TriStar.

Elfquest. Film/TV. Abby Lou Prod. Freedom Distrib.

Evangeline. Film. FF.

Exosquad. AN TV series. U. W/ Kathy Benson. Fall bow.

Family Dog. AN specials. Airing throughout spring on CBS.

Fantastic Four. Film. (see article).

Flaming Carrot. Film. Tundra/Limelight

The Flintstones. Film. Fred: John Goodman. Barney: Rick Moranis. U/Am. D: Brian Levant. S: Jim Jennewein, Tom Parker, Gary Ross. P: Bruce Cohen, Colin Wilson. Lensing. Two more ABC TV specials: *Hollyrock-A-Bye Baby* & *Christmas Misdemeanors*.

G.I. Joe. Film. S/D: Sheldon Lettich. P: A&J Gentile, M. Abrams, C. Kirkwood. WB.

The Green Falcon. TV. Am. C. Mick Garris.

The Green Hornet. Film. S: Chuck Pfarrer. U.

The Incredible Hulk. Film.

Iron Man. Film.

Jonny Quest. AN TV movie. *Jonny's Golden Quest*. HB.

Judge Dredd. Film.

Kull. Film. U. S: Charles Pogue.

The Lion King. AN film. WD. Nov. '94.

Lone Wolf & Cub. Film D: John Bruno. P: Ed Pressman. S: Bill Wisher

Mai the Psychic Girl. Film.

The Mask. Film. New Line. S/D: Chuck Russell.

The Men in Black. Film. Col. P: Walter Parkes, Laurie McDonald.

Mr. Magoo. Film. Am/WB.

Model by Day. TV movie. Fox. w/ Famke Janssen. S: J. Loeb II, M. Weisman. D: Christian Duguay.

1-800-Monster. TV. USA. EP/S: Jonathan Betuel.

Pagemaster. AN film. Fox/HB. W/ Macaulay Culkin, Christopher Lloyd.

Paparazzi Samurai. AN TV series. P: DIC, Abrams/Gentile.

Peanuts. LA film. P/S: John Hughes. WB.

The Phantom. Film. PP. S: Jeff Boam.

Plastic Man. Film. WB/Am. S: L. Wilson. D: B. Spicer.

Pocahontas. AN film. WD. Spring '94.

Prince Valiant. AN series. Family Chan. LA film. S: M. Beckner. N. Constantin Film.

The Princess & the Goblin. AN film. Due out spring.

Red Sonja. TV. Lancit.

Reid Fleming. Film.

S: creator David Boswell

P: M. Weisman, J. Loeb II.

Richie Rich. Film. P: J. Silver. J. Davis. S: Neil Tolkin

RoboCop 3. S: Frank Miller & Fred Dekker (D). Summer.

Roger Rabbit. AN "Trail Mix Up." WD. Out spring.

Rupert the Bear. AN. Nel.

The Saint. Film. P: Robert Evans. S: Jeff Boam. PP.

Sandman. Film.

Scooby Doo. Film. WB.

Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver. Bob Zemeckis. WB.

The Shadow. Film. S: David Koepp. P: Martin Bregman. D: Russell Mulcahy. W/ Alec Baldwin. Films July.

Speed Racer. AN TV series. Fred Wolf Films. Fall '93 bow. Film. D: Patrick Read Johnson. S: John Lawton. WB.

Spider-Man. Film. D: Jim Cameron. Summer '95.

Starwatcher. AN film. P: Ridley Scott, Videosystem. D: Moebius. Pino van Lamsweerde. S: Moebius, J. Fryszman. J. L. Fromental. PP.

Superman. TV series. ABC. Lorimar. TV movie pilot.S: Deborah Joy Levine.

Super Mario Bros. LA film. S: Barry Morrow. D: Rocky Morton, Annabel Jankel. W/ Bob Hoskins. May '93 bow.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. AN series. CBS. Syn.

Terry & the Pirates. TV.

Time Cop. Film. D: Sam Raimi. DH/L.

Tom & Jerry. AN film. P/D: Phil Roman. Summer.

Trouble with Girls. Film. Fox/FF. S: W. Jacobs, G. Jones.

We're Back. AN film. Am/UA. Fall '93.

Wild Cards. Film. Disney. S: George R.R. Martin. P: Michael Engelberg.

Wild Palms. TV mini-series. Airs April.

Wizard of Id. Film. Cinergi.

Wyrd. TV. Lorimar. P: Joel Simon, Bill Todman Jr. EP/D: Joe Dante. Fox.

Wonder Woman. AN TV specials.

Zen. Film. AN series. R.

Zorro. Film. S: J. Randal Johnson, Joel Gross. TriStar. LA TV series. F. Chan. AN TV series. Nel.

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*Produced by The River Group under exclusive license from DEFIANT.

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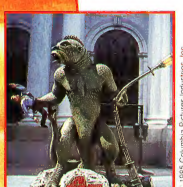

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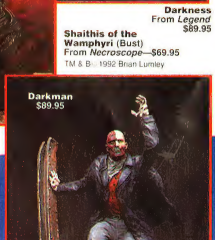

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PLASM™

THE ZERO ISSUE TRADING CARD SET

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PLASM ZERO ISSUE TRADING CARDS!

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THE *PLASM* STORY

The cornerstone of the new DEFIANT universe is PLASM, a visually outrageous, high-concept fantasy. The PLASM storyline takes place both on Earth and in an extra-dimen- sional worldspace named PLASM.

A nanosecond-thin reality-veil separates Earth from this extraordinary universe. PLASM is entirely organic: everything is alive (including buildings and vehicles) and is genetically engineered to live for its purpose. Manipulation of living tissue is as normal in PLASM as changing clothes is on Earth, so Plasmoids are unimaginably diverse.

PLASM provides the conceptual base for other titles to follow from DEFIANT. With a Zero Issue trading card set, it is certainly the new wave of the marketplace.

Available only through your local IADD

PLASM
Creator/Writer: Jim Shooter
Illustrator: David Lapham
Painter/Design Director: Janet Jackson

THE RIVER GROUP

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